# 1

## *Conflict Coaching*

### Conflict Management Strategies and Skills for the Individual

*I am not afraid of storms for I am learning how to sail my ship.*

—Louisa May Alcott

Rowan is a conflict resolution practitioner in a small consulting group. Although she originally entered the field as a mediator, most of her time is now spent as a training development professional delivering topics such as dealing with difficult people in the workplace and conflict styles. After a recent seminar, she was approached by a participant named Kathryn who requested one-on-one assistance with more effectively handling the confrontational style of her immediate supervisor, a senior leader in the organization. Kathryn wanted to better manage her day-to-day communications with this person and also develop herself as a viable candidate for a top-level position. Rowan did not immediately know how to structure a service for Kathryn but was confident that she could be of help.

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Mara is the dispute resolution manager in a large federal organization. While the program she heads is widely regarded as a success (mainly because it resolves many employment disputes through voluntary mediation) she feels dissatisfied that her office regularly turns away individual disputants when counterparties are uninterested in trying mediation or another dyadic or multiparty process.

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**David and Linda** are the respective heads of human resources and organizational learning in a national insurance company. They have teamed up to create a positive conflict culture in the organization. They are especially interested in the prospect of strengthening supervisor-supervisee relationships by developing supervisors' conflict management skills.

I t is striking that while the conflict resolution field has numerous processes for two or more clients, offerings for the individual client are relatively underdeveloped. We believe conflict coaching is a promising means of addressing this gap. Conflict coaching is a process of conflict intervention involving one disputant/client and one conflict resolution professional. Given the resonance of one-on-one professional coaching and the fact that it is often not feasible to engage two or more parties simultaneously, there is a need to advance this process. With the body of conflict communication theory and research, there is a bountiful reservoir on which to draw.

Each of the brief opening cases represents an opportunity to introduce the practice of conflict coaching. Rowan could coach Kathryn regarding her current tensions with her supervisor and more broadly as a promising senior-level leader in a particular organizational conflict culture. Mara is in a position to add conflict coaching as an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) process offering within her organization, possibly with internal capacity or with an outside collaborator. David and Linda may find it appealing to train supervisors in a tailored conflict coaching model as a way of strengthening the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Obviously, many other conflict coaching scenarios are also possible.

In this chapter, we offer a general definition of conflict coaching and explore its two main sources of development, namely the executive coaching and conflict resolution communities. We then propose likely drivers of continued development for conflict coaching before presenting some important conflict coaching principles. The current chapter concludes with a number of reasons why the conflict resolution community, in particular, has much to contribute and gain by developing conflict coaching. This sets the stage for the next chapter, which introduces the Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model, elaborated in detail throughout the remainder of the book.

## A General Definition of Conflict Coaching

*Conflict coaching* is a process in which a coach and client communicate one-on-one for the purpose of developing the client's conflict-related

understanding, interaction strategies, and interaction skills. The definition is broad in that it encompasses different forms of communication between the coach and client. Conflict coaching, as it is explored and refined here, is primarily understood as a face-to-face interaction with occasional use of print-based activities and resources; however, it can also reasonably take place via the telephone, Internet, or other oral, written, and/or visual media. The definition is also expansive, as it permits different kinds of conflict-related conversations to take place, including but not limited to ways of making sense of conflict, general plans for actively managing conflict, and specific communication behaviors for the client to possibly enact. While contextual issues (including interpersonal, organizational, and cultural factors) are certainly central to any coaching conversation, they are not included in the definition; this allows for the application of conflict coaching in a wide variety of relational circumstances. Finally, this basic definition allows significantly different coaching models to be proposed. For instance, the model proposed in this book takes a moderate position on the use of the coach's expert knowledge base within the coaching session. Some may argue for stronger use of the coach's perspective, while others may argue that it should be more restrained.

## Sources of Development: An Overview of *Conflict* and *Coaching* in the Executive Coaching and Conflict Resolution Fields

Over the past two decades, the concepts of *conflict* and *coaching* have been addressed in combination by a number of different scholars and practitioners. These writings can be grouped in two general categories, although it should be emphasized that they basically developed simultaneously and sometimes thematically overlap. The first category is made up of work from the executive coaching field that, usually incidentally, mentions conflict as playing a role in the executive coaching process. The second category captures work from an explicit conflict resolution point of view.

### BACKGROUND ON EXECUTIVE COACHING

Executive coaching is usually one-on-one professional development within an organizational setting. Tobias (1996) noted that the term first appeared in business settings in the late 1980s and came about not as

a strikingly new concept or practice but as a more appealing label for a practice of consultation offered to managers and senior leaders that had evolved over time. A thorough review of the literature generally supports this view (Kampa-Kokesch, 2001). Berglas (2002) stated that there were 2,000 executive coaches in 1996 and at least 10,000 in 2002, and there are projected to be more than 50,000 by 2007.

Executive coaching can be narrow to expansive in terms of topics and duration. It has been used to teach specific skills, improve job performance, prepare for professional advancement, and assist with broader purposes such as an executive's agenda for major organizational change (Witherspoon & White, 1996).

Diedrich (1996) worked to modify an executive's style, assist executives in adjusting to change, help in developmental efforts, and provide assistance to derailed executives. Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, and Doyle (1996) characterized approximately one-quarter of their clients as needing help preparing for advancement, a second quarter having performance problems, and the remaining half as needing to reinforce their existing areas of strength. Levinson (1996) noted simply that executive coaching largely involves supporting clients as they advance in terms of adaptive work behaviors. Those with a stronger popular emphasis also commonly include life coaching within an executive coaching framework. For instance, Morgan, Harkins, and Goldsmith (2005) make distinctions in terms of coaching leaders and behavioral coaching, career and life coaching, coaching for leadership development, coaching for organizational change, and strategy coaching. Given the topical breadth of executive coaching, it is not surprising that the coaching relationship may be limited to one or two meetings or extend over many years.

## CONFLICT AND COACHING IN THE EXECUTIVE COACHING COMMUNITY

As briefly introduced earlier, the terms *conflict* and *coaching* seem to have been first joined together in 1994 when Stern (1994) commented on the potential importance of addressing the topic of conflict management within executive coaching work. He noted that executive coaching may be relevant in situations where executives trigger conflict ineffectively or perpetuate destructive conflict.

Kilburg (2000), a prominent executive coaching scholar who has written numerous articles for academically grounded consulting psychologists, wrote a book chapter titled "Working with Client Conflicts." The chapter, consistent with the overall book and Kilburg's general perspective, addressed clients' internal and external conflicts as understood in

terms of a combined psychodynamic and systems approach. The chapter is a notable contribution to conflict coaching, especially but not exclusively for those working from a therapeutic background. As well as providing general guidelines, Kilburg offered suggestions for coaches working with executives who are effecting change, managing boundaries and limits, dealing with spiritual and moral issues, and valuing diversity.

Kets de Vries (2005), another executive coaching author working from a psychotherapeutic orientation, combined the concepts of conflict and coaching in terms of more broadly addressing group-based leadership coaching. He proposed that there are important benefits to carrying out leadership coaching in a group setting, in part because it allows for effective conflict resolution.

Coaching for conflict is integral to the executive coaching field because conflict permeates the executive's work world. "Coping with internal and external problems forms the foundation of managerial work, and these problems almost always consist of some form of human conflict" (Kilburg, 2000, p. 217).

## CONFLICT AND COACHING IN THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION COMMUNITY

The need for a one-on-one conflict resolution process, in cases where only one party was present for mediation, emerged at Macquarie University in Australia in 1993 (Tidwell, 1997). A response to this need was formalized and put into practice on campus three years later and was known as "problem solving for one." This process involved a six-step model based on the generation of multiple solutions and the selection of optimal solutions through a cost-benefit analysis.

Conflict coaching seems to have first been named as such in and actively practiced in North America as of January 1996 at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Brinkert, 1999). The campus conflict resolution program was experiencing a low demand for mediation and, consequently, conflict coaching was developed under the co-leadership of professors Joseph P. Folger and Tricia S. Jones. Conflict coaching thereafter became one of the conflict-related services promoted (Jameson, 1998) and engaged in by the Temple campus community. While conflict coaching at Temple was limited to conflict styles coaching until spring 2000 (Brinkert, 2000), it was expanded shortly thereafter to include such subtypes as coaching for confrontation, coaching for diversity, and coaching in possible preparation for mediation. Conflict coaching remains a central conflict resolution service offered on Temple's campus and, year-to-year, is consistently put into practice more often than mediation.

In the current decade, conflict and coaching have been addressed in the literature in ways that differ from the definition of conflict coaching presented at the outset of this chapter. Keil (2000) applied the coaching metaphor to intervening with work teams. Blitman and Maes (2004) suggested ways that skills and behaviors associated with sports coaches may be helpful within mediation. An article in *Personnel Today* (NHS Conflict, 2005) noted the need for a massive amount of "conflict coaching training" (or group-based training meant to assist professionals in working through conflict with clients) in Great Britain's National Health Service (NHS). The NHS Counter Fraud and Security Management Service (CFSMS) was instructed to train 750,000 employees in techniques to calm people in potentially violent situations. The training is reportedly behind schedule but is to be carried out by 2008.

Conflict coaching as a one-on-one process has grown in significance over the past 10 years. It is a service marketed by a growing number of for-profit and not-for-profit conflict resolution organizations and individual practitioners. It has visibility on the relatively popular www .mediate.com Web site and appears to be a growing topic of interest at the annual Association for Conflict Resolution conference.

The emergence of conflict coaching as a recognizable and valued intervention process is perhaps most evident given that highly visible organizations are adopting the practice. Cloke and Goldsmith (2000) noted the opportunity to use coaching as one conflict resolution method in organizations. More recently, Weiss and Hughes (2005) recommended, as one of six strategies, that companies use the escalation of conflict as an opportunity for coaching. They went on to describe how IBM executives receive training in conflict management and are provided with online resources to assist them in coaching others. C. Noble (personal communication, April 9, 2007) developed a proprietary conflict coaching model that has been used for the peer conflict coaching program in the Transportation Security Administration, a division of Homeland Security. As Guttman (2005) commented, conflict coaching is relevant for building leadership competency. As such, it is of interest to training development, human resource, and other professionals who regularly facilitate such initiatives.

## LIKELY DRIVERS OF CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT FOR CONFLICT COACHING

This section identifies some reasons why conflict coaching is likely to expand in the coming years. Most of these drivers of continued development flow out of the early emergence of conflict coaching as outlined

above. Drawing these together arguably demonstrates a promising future for conflict coaching.

*The continued concern with conflict management in a complex service economy.* Ongoing emphasis on interpersonal, team, and organizational communication in a complex global service economy will likely mean that organizations will make investments in one-on-one assistance as well as other types of professional development for their leaders, managers, and frontline workers. Effective conflict management is an integral part of an economy emphasizing service and communication. The continued growth of the global service sector and ongoing collaboration and competitiveness in the sector seem to suggest growing opportunities to offer conflict coaching. This trend also suggests growth for the conflict management field in general. There will likely be increased demand for conflict coaching theory and research as well as for practice tools as established universities increasingly and visibly develop coaching programs, especially within their business schools (for instance, Georgetown University, INSEAD, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Pennsylvania).

*The strong commitment in many areas of society to productively and ethically manage conflict.* Again, this is a trend that broadly supports the growth of the conflict management field. Organizations and individuals frequently have expectations that conflicts should be handled appropriately. Even an all-star organizational performer may not be tolerated if he or she drives other important or promising members from the organization or is otherwise significantly out of step with the culture and goals of the organization.

*The continued need for a one-on-one ADR process.* While ADR may be ideally suited to purely dyadic or group interventions because of the way that it provides insights and tools for improved interaction, there is still a need to make ADR accessible to individuals. Many clients and ADR professionals acknowledge this reality. Dyadic and multiparty options may not be possible, at least not immediately. It is well accepted among mediators that many mediation referrals do not lead to mediation because one or more parties is reluctant to participate in that process. These parties may find it more appealing to try conflict coaching. Conflict coaching may function as a way of increasing awareness of options for addressing the conflict, including the availability of traditional ADR processes. For some, conflict coaching may be more attractive than other processes for reasons of perceived efficiency and/or effectiveness.

*The need for a process that has a strong and tailored skills emphasis.* While ADR processes such as mediation offer spaces where parties can interact in more productive ways, and while ADR training activities

typically introduce new knowledge and skills in a general manner, conflict coaching offers a unique blend of possibilities for clients. Conflict coaching represents a considerable breakthrough as a conflict management process, as it provides clients with strategies and skills customized to their conflict situations in a relationship rich with interaction. In this respect, conflict coaching complements existing ADR process options and training opportunities. It promises something different, for example, than "mediation for one" or "training for one." It is a fundamentally different opportunity for addressing conflict more appropriately and effectively. Further, conflict coaching may put the unused and underused existing talents and abilities of ADR professionals into use.

*Increasing market recognition and demand.* The term *conflict coaching* and its basic practice have gained common currency, particularly as they have been visibly adopted by large organizations such as IBM (Weiss & Hughes, 2005). The application of conflict coaching within a growing list of organizations has left many with the sense that it is successful. Of course, peer-reviewed research is certainly needed to justify this view. In some cases, individuals have self-initiated a coaching-type relationship with a trusted ADR professional because they perceived the ADR professional as having expertise that would be valuable to access in a one-on-one format. Also, some ADR and executive coaching professionals have observed more generalized demand for these services and have branded their services as executive coaching and/or conflict coaching in order to attract clients. More and more individuals have some awareness of the term *conflict coaching* both inside and outside the conflict management field.

*Increasing interest in the use of conflict coaching as a way to integrate and promote existing ADR processes.* The fact that there are a number of established ADR processes does not solve the practical challenge of creating visibility, including providing ways for individuals to determine their appropriateness. Given the habit and preference of most individuals to make one-on-one inquiries regarding conflict-related issues, it seems that most would be amenable to an ADR triage process that is individual in nature. Conflict coaching may be used to introduce mediation, as an entry point in the ombuds process, and to make a more robust organizational dispute resolution system. During intake for a mediation, the mediator typically talks to each party to explain the process and, depending on the type of mediation, coaches them so they can interact in a productive manner. Many mediators do not learn this skill in their training. Ombuds offices may be involved in transitioning parties to mediation but often do much more, as these offices attract parties with many different concerns (Warters, 2000). Conflict coaching may be well

suited to much of the person-to-person problem solving in which ombudspeople engage. And it may help open up the ombudsperson role to be more systemic in nature, as has been called for in that professional specialty (Wagner, 2000), by incorporating a system of conflict intervention options. This could conceivably result in greater numbers of individuals making use of established ADR processes.

There is evidence that organizational dispute resolution systems that have components in alignment are more effective (Bendersky, 2003). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that having more components in alignment (i.e., adding conflict coaching to the mix of ADR process offerings) might further enhance effectiveness. The success of existing in-house dispute resolution systems, the best of which resolve up to 90 percent of employee complaints internally (Wexler, 2000), suggests that this is a path worth pursuing.

*The likely emergence of conflict coaching as a recognizable executive coaching specialty.* Executive coaching continues to have considerable appeal within a wide range of workplace circles. Although some of this appeal may come from the breadth of the process, it is reasonable to assume that there will be increased specialization within executive coaching. Expertise is specialized by nature. Therefore, all other considerations being equal, an individual needing or wanting to work on a conflict-related issue will probably seek out and work with a conflict communication specialist. Conflict communication is central to supervising others, coordinating with peers, influencing upward in the organizational hierarchy, and managing relationships with clients and other external constituencies. Runde and Flanagan (2007) insisted that the ability to handle conflict is a top skill of successful leaders today and is essential to an organization's competitiveness. These authors pointed out that the much talked about need for leaders to be more emotionally competent is intimately linked with their need to be more conflict competent. Runde and Flanagan also emphasize that leaders will themselves admit that there are high costs associated with ineffectively managing conflict.

*Continued support and direct involvement from organizational communication professionals who see value as an add-on or alternative to consulting, training, other types of coaching, etc.* There are a number of human resource insiders, external consultants, training development professionals, executive coaches, and others who have experienced the need for an allied or alternative intervention in the form of conflict coaching. A human resource specialist or external consultant might not only support a senior leader in defining a strategic message, but he or she might also assist the leader in determining an approach and developing related skills to execute conflict-related aspects of the overall strategy. A training development professional might see

the opportunity to assist a participant in developing conflict awareness, strategy, and skills in a more specialized format due to the participant's unique abilities, responsibilities, challenges, and/or opportunities. Some human resource specialists, organizational communication consultants, and training development professionals may want to hone an additional expertise as a conflict coach. Others will want to focus on existing areas of expertise and refer conflict coaching work to colleagues.

*Continued development of conflict coaching curricula in graduate and undergraduate programs.* When academic programs begin to develop courses and formal curricula in an area, it is a sure sign that the topic has gained a legitimacy. Likewise, the existence of courses and curricula continue to promote and support enhancement of the theory and research in that area. We are fortunate that we have courses on conflict coaching that are already being taught at respected programs in conflict management and dispute resolution (for example, at Columbia University, Kennesaw State University, Salisbury University, and Temple University).

## Conflict Coaching Principles

Given the early development of conflict coaching, likely drivers of continued growth for conflict coaching, and broad lessons learned from the introduction of other ADR processes and other consulting and training interventions, we propose the following principles for the practice of conflict coaching. These principles are reflected in the Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model that is introduced in the next chapter and explained in detail throughout the remainder of the book.

*A flexible model is vital.* While some aspects of the conflict coaching process may always or at least often follow a linear pattern, movement throughout stages or onto and off of thematic touchstones is often flexible. The Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model is presented in stages that have an internal logic. We believe that the logic is compelling enough for the coach and client to follow these stages in many coaching situations. However, we do not believe that coaching is limited to a lock-step application of these stages. The stages could occur in a nonlinear or even simultaneous manner.

*Both direct and indirect clients should be considered in the coaching experience.* There are organizational or systems participants and stakeholders who may need to be considered in the process of coaching, even though they are not in the room. The organization, in the form of one or more organizational representatives, can play the role of indirect client. Involvement of indirect clients underscores the importance of the organizational context for the

disputant. Whether indirect clients are involved in conversations about the coaching process is a case-by-case decision. But all conflict coaching should focus on whether critical indirect clients exist, who they are, and how they might be effectively involved or simply acknowledged.

*A relational and systems orientation to conflict coaching is essential.* Conflicts must be understood as social constructions of interdependent relationships with normative structures that influence interpretation and action. The Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model is strongly relational in that it assumes a client's conflict only makes sense in terms of his or her relationship to others—his or her web of relationships that define the critical social context. The context of the dispute includes culture in various forms. As such, the conflict coaching conversation never steps out of contextual or cultural concerns. Consequently, within any given coaching session, it is a reasonable expectation that the coach should directly acknowledge this issue, especially if the client does not.

*Coaching is a contingent activity.* Knowledge is never complete, and coaching should emphasize that there is always another point of view, another way of knowing that might alter the understanding of the conflict. Both the coach and client should be encouraged to take a contingent approach to understanding and approaching conflict. This has deep implications for conflict coaching. In part it means: (a) The coach should express humility even while speaking as an expert; (b) the client should be encouraged to develop his or her understanding and appreciation for the complex and ongoing dance of conflict, particularly given his or her unique circumstances; and (c) coaches and clients should be cautioned about the inherent inability to definitively understand past or present conflict as well as definitively plan future action at strategic or tactical levels.

*Conflict coaches should be knowledgeable about conflict theory and research as well as competent in conflict analysis.* Conflict coaching requires a knowledge base that not all aspiring coaches have acquired. For the model proposed in this book, the conflict coach needs to be knowledgeable and experienced in conflict research and theory, be knowledgeable and experienced in facilitating adult learning, have considered his or her own cultural background (including perceptions and possible biases), and have some understanding of the context in which the client is experiencing the conflict. Extrapolating from lessons learned from the study of mediator competence (Lieberman, Foux-Levy, & Segal, 2005), conflict coaches should be involved in ongoing training that is both practical and clearly related to theory. Further, coach assessment should combine self-assessment and assessment by others. Finally, coaches' abilities to recognize and respond to clients' emotions may be especially important to develop (Jones, 2005).

*Coaching aims to foster client empowerment with the coach combining expert and facilitative approaches.* Conflict research and theory can routinely be made accessible and can often be of notable value to individual disputants. Therefore, it is appropriate for coaches to combine expert and facilitative approaches and to share this information. While this model fully embraces the conflict coach as sometimes acting in an expert role, coaches should only assume this stance if they are suitably qualified. Because expertise is limited by its very definition, coaches should expect, not infrequently, to express the limits of their knowledge and/or to recommend outside experts or authoritative resources. Although this model involves the conflict coach occasionally adopting an expert role, this role should not predominate. Any individual conflict coaching session or ongoing conflict coaching relationship should have a general conversational quality. We caution against excessive directiveness by the conflict coach especially, given some practitioner research (Bacon & Spear, 2003) in the executive coaching field, including contrasting findings regarding the coach's role as perceived by the coach and client. However, arguing that any coach directiveness is inappropriate is unwise, given the value of an executive coach's expertise as demonstrated by Wasylyshyn (2003).

Coaching is about helping someone reflect on conflict and possible courses of change; it is not about forcing that reflection or change. Because the client has control and responsibility, his or her point of view is central to the coaching process. The client retains full control about which perspectives to consider as well as which strategies and skills to use outside of the coaching session. While the coach should encourage the client to be aware of multiple perspectives and practical opportunities within the conflict, and the coach can give advice about a particular viewpoint or course of action, the client determines what can be done. We encourage coaches to embrace an active role in providing clients with information and alternatives that will foster client empowerment.

The coach has a responsibility to sufficiently understand the particular client's point of view of the conflict, including the conflict context, prior to offering additional perspectives or specific practical opportunities. The sharing of perspectives and practical opportunities by the coach should always be followed by a clear invitation for the client to respond. This response, even a negative response, should be treated with respect by the coach and integrated into the overall conversation.

*Conflict coaching is not appropriate for all cases.* There are a variety of reasons why conflict coaching may not be a good alternative. Organizations may advocate coaching as a means of manipulating or silencing. A client may not have the cognitive, emotional, or behavioral competence to participate productively in coaching. There may be a larger social issue that

requires an alternative action before or in addition to coaching, but where coaching alone is not appropriate. In some cases, conflict coaching may begin, but the coach or client may realize that the process is flawed and should be discontinued. In Chapter Two we discuss terminating a conflict coaching process and relationship in more detail. Here, it is important to note that such termination can and, when appropriate, should happen.

*Conflict coaching should follow a principle of efficiency.* A common question about conflict coaching and executive coaching is, "How long will this take?" Of course, there is no definitive answer to that question other than, "It depends." Still, we believe that conflict coaching should attempt to follow a basic principle of efficiency—getting the most benefit with the least amount of time and effort. Some executive coaches describe their coaching relationships as taking months or even years. While there may be some mutually defined conflict coaching relationships of this length, we encourage coaches to think in terms of shorter-term coaching cycles in which the client can move quickly through analysis and action planning to intervention and assessment.

*Conflict coaching should follow a high ethical standard.* Any discussion of ethics is fraught with disagreement about what is ethical and how one should behave to enact that standard. In the conflict field, ethical codes of conduct are generated and continually debated. This is certainly the case with the practice of mediation despite considerable attention being focused on mediation ethics over the span of many years (McCorkle, 2005). But we believe that no conflict process can be introduced without a consideration of ethics. Even if the frequency with which conflict coaching is used does not grow, a serious examination of conflict coaching ethics is needed within the ADR field.

Whether or not this field-level conversation takes place anytime soon, coaches and organized coaching programs need to be clear with themselves and with potential clients about fundamental ethical matters such as impartiality, conflict of interest, dual roles, and confidentiality. Impartiality would seem to be primarily concerned with ensuring that the coach has no prejudice toward the client. In terms of conflict of interest, the coach has a responsibility to disclose any and all actual or potential dealings or relationships that would result in bias against the client. Likewise dual roles prior to and during the conflict, and those foreseen after conflict coaching, should be directly acknowledged to the client. In order to reasonably safeguard the client and make the process as effective as possible, we strongly advise that, where dual roles exist for coaches, these are put aside within individual coaching sessions. However, we recognize that the complexity of this issue means that it must be more thoroughly considered for each context. The boundaries of confidentiality also need to be made clear to

clients prior to engaging in a coaching session. This can be a challenging but vital issue to clarify in some cases, such as those involving an organizational sponsor who insists on some degree of reporting regarding a particular client's coaching involvement or progress. Other matters such as responsibility for the coaching process and outcomes, coach compensation, other coach and client commitments, and the procedure for terminating the coach-client relationship should all be dealt with at the outset of the coaching relationship. Where major ethical compromises exist, the coach should independently withdraw from acting in a coaching capacity.

*Conflict coaching requires quality control, assessment, and monitoring.* As with any professional human intervention and any business practice, conflict coaching should be introduced only where it can reasonably be considered in alignment with the goals and capacities of those involved and where it can otherwise be executed successfully. Just as important, it should be adopted only in circumstances where there is a commitment from the outset to ensuring quality thresholds, systematic scanning for unanticipated negative and positive outcomes, and a general striving to develop a stronger process through continuous learning on a multitude of levels. Just as the use of other ADR processes tends to be more readily accepted if it is institutionalized before conflicts arise, so too may quality control, assessment, and monitoring be best introduced prior to the start of conflict coaching activities.

*Conflict coaching should be seen as part of a larger system of conflict management.* Conflict coaching is most powerful if it is offered within a context-specific organizational dispute system, or at least where it is offered within the context of more generally available ADR options. In no respect is conflict coaching meant to supplant more established conflict management options or deemphasize the value of a systemic approach. On the contrary, conflict coaching should be introduced in a manner that strengthens the attractiveness, use, and outcomes of organizational dispute systems and ADR.

Conflict coaching can function as an inflow, parallel, or outflow mechanism for mediation, ombuds processes, and other ADR and organizational dispute system processes. An effective conflict coaching model integrates with a wide range of process options, in the very least, by minimally introducing those options to clients. In this manner, conflict coaching can work well as an initial process for clients and the conflict professionals they engage. Conflict coaching can provide a good setting for the client, and possibly also the coach, to determine the appropriateness and appeal of other conflict processes. Conflict coaching can also be used parallel to or after other processes. In organizational dispute system terms, conflict coaching should be seen as a key loop back process. Conflict coaching is a process to which people can always return as a way

of refocusing a conflict at the interest-based level. Of course, the coach must be considerate of potential conflicts in cases where he or she functions in different professional roles with a given client.

Conflict coaching can serve an individual or a group of clients, and the client(s) can likewise be involved in conflict with an individual or group. Although conflict coaching may have gained early appeal and may have primary ongoing appeal as a way to offer conflict management services to individuals who are alone in seeking professional assistance, other client configurations are certainly possible. For instance, two clients in conflict with one another may both opt for conflict coaching prior to, after, or in place of mediation. Conflict coaching may need to be adapted somewhat but is certainly also possible with a client group representing a common party in a conflict. The coaching client(s) may be using the conflict coaching process to explore strategies and skills with another party consisting of one or more individuals or a defined group.

*Conflict coaching must be sensitive to various cultural contexts.* The direct and indirect parties to conflict coaching are never outside of culture. Cultures relevant to a given coaching interaction may exist at both broad and narrow levels and are likely to be multiple even for a single individual. While most professionals inside and outside of the conflict management field may generally appreciate the importance of relatively universal cultural concerns such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, more local cultural concerns can be just as significant. These can include organizational culture, organization department-level culture, regional differences, industry sector culture, and professional culture. The overall design of a conflict coaching program needs to take prevailing cultural currents into account. Cultural currents also need to be taken into account within specific conflict coaching relationships.

## Major Reasons for the Conflict
## Resolution Field to Develop Conflict Coaching

We are committed to the "big tent" approach to the development of conflict coaching. While we are communication scholars, the approach to conflict coaching detailed in this book draws from multiple disciplines. More broadly, we believe that the continued growth of the conflict coaching process relies on the (loosely) coordinated involvement of currently active professionals representing diverse academic, applied, and personal backgrounds. One such community where we have encountered such productive diversity is in the conflict resolution field. It is our hope that those in this field—together with those from allied fields—become active in the growth of the conflict coaching process. Two main reasons for doing so follow.

*The conflict resolution field can enhance the theory, research, and practice of conflict coaching.* The range of academic and professional disciplines (including executive coaching) as well as diverse cultural backgrounds represented by those within the conflict resolution field means that conflict coaching could be advanced with increased commitment. Arguably, no scholarly or professional field is better positioned to develop the practice theoretically, facilitate clients' involvement with the process, conduct research, and use research findings to further the process. One of the most exciting opportunities for the conflict resolution field might be increasing access to what many would reasonably see as a desirable, tailored, professional development intervention. As Wasylyshyn (2003) noted, executive coaching tends to be highly valued by clients but seems largely to be limited in access to those in positions of privilege. Conflict coaching may be of benefit to those not only in many reaches of an organization but also in many reaches of broader society. Of course, conflict coaching needs to be developed with a certain degree of restraint as indicated by evidence of the use of executive coaching in situations that warranted other change interventions, most notably systemic or structural change (Murphy, 2005). The conflict resolution field can reasonably take on this responsibility given its history of using multiple means of intervention.

*Conflict coaching can support the advancement of the conflict resolution field.* Just as the conflict resolution field may grow the conflict coaching process, so too may the opposite be true. Conflict coaching is an opportunity for the field to develop at the scholarly and practitioner levels. Conflict coaching can support core conflict resolution processes. For instance, mediation can get increased visibility as it is introduced through the coaching process. Overall, conflict coaching can act as a vehicle for raising the visibility of the conflict resolution community with various individuals and organizations, including current executive coaches, life coaches, and those administering such services.

Developing conflict coaching related to mediation is perhaps the most obvious move, but developing conflict coaching in a larger sense, in relation to substantive areas of conflict communication theory and research, could arguably offer the deepest and broadest breakthroughs. Conflict coaching can incorporate and reinforce substantive areas of the conflict communication literature that have not been broadly or deeply recognized by the conflict resolution community.

Conflict coaching may have additional appeal to conflict resolution practitioners as it allows them to market an additional service, one that is increasingly seen as cost effective from both supply and demand standpoints. With an increasing push for credentialing within the executive coaching field (Natale & Diamante, 2005), the issue of the conflict

resolution community's stake in the larger professional coaching field merits attention.

## Conclusion

This chapter began with a definition of conflict coaching, charted sources of development, indicated some likely drivers of continued development, provided general conflict coaching principles, and offered some major reasons for the conflict resolution field to develop this new process. We now turn toward an introduction of the Comprehensive Conflict Coaching model and lead into this introduction with a consideration of existing coaching models in the executive coaching and conflict coaching arenas.

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## Chapter Summary

Conflict coaching is the process in which a coach and client communicate one-on-one for the purpose of developing the client's conflict-related understanding, interaction strategies, and interaction skills.

### LIKELY DRIVERS OF CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT FOR CONFLICT COACHING

- The ongoing emphasis on conflict management in a complex service economy
- The strong commitment in many areas of society to productively and ethically manage conflict
- The continued need for a one-on-one ADR process
- The need for a process that has a strong and tailored skills emphasis
- Increasing market recognition and demand
- Increasing interest in the use of conflict coaching as a way to integrate and promote existing ADR processes
- The likely emergence of conflict coaching as a recognizable executive coaching specialty
- Continued support and direct involvement from organizational communication professionals who see value as an add-on or alternative to consulting, training, other types of coaching, etc.
- Continued development of conflict coaching curricula in graduate and undergraduate programs

*(Continued)*

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## CONFLICT COACHING PRINCIPLES

- A flexible model is vital.
- Both direct and indirect clients should be considered in the coaching experience.
- A relational and systems orientation to conflict coaching is essential.
- Coaching is a contingent activity.
- Conflict coaches should be knowledgeable about conflict theory and research as well as competent in conflict analysis.
- Coaching aims to foster client empowerment with the coach combining expert and facilitative approaches.
- Conflict coaching is not appropriate for all cases.
- Conflict coaching should follow a principle of efficiency.
- Conflict coaching should follow a high ethical standard.
- Conflict coaching requires quality control, assessment, and monitoring.
- Conflict coaching should be seen as part of a larger system of conflict management.
- Conflict coaching can function as an inflow, parallel, or outflow mechanism for mediation, ombuds processes, and other ADR and organizational dispute system processes.
- Conflict coaching can serve an individual or a group of clients, and the client(s) can likewise be involved in conflict with an individual or group.
- Conflict coaching must be sensitive to various cultural contexts.