



Is Coaching What This Moment Is Asking For?

A quick read for leaders weighing coaching. Not a pitch, and not a résumé.

Every leader I work with can describe what's happening with reasonable precision. The terrain has shifted. Old approaches aren't right for novel conditions. Something needs to change, and they can feel it, but when I ask *what comes next...*, there's a pause.

Not from lack of will, and not from lack of intelligence. They pause because the maps that they've relied on no longer match the landscape, and most of what the leadership development world offers in response is ... more maps.

That pause isn't failure, and it isn't yet crisis. It's a threshold.

Coaching is built for thresholds.

Whether it's built for yours is what these pages are meant to help you weigh: what coaching actually is, what the work is like, and whether it's worth a conversation.

WHAT COACHING IS, AND IS NOT

Most leaders have met coaching in some form. Many have also met things called coaching that weren't. Three things coaching is often confused with:

Training Gives you information, some of it excellent, but not the capacity to use it under conditions it was never designed for.	Consulting Works on what you know, do, say, and how you show up. Tweaks the <i>outer game</i> while still running an old <i>inner game</i> .	Mentoring Passes along someone else's map. But their roads don't resemble yours, and their map will not match your terrain.
Coaching Builds your capability to wrestle with hard questions, and starts one step earlier than most: less "How do I lead better?" and more "What am I actually leading from, what's my source, my inner operating system?" Until you can name that, all the skill-building in the world gets spent in service of the wrong thing. <i>The goal isn't better answers. It's the capacity under pressure to hold not knowing what the "right" questions even look like and still make your way forward one adaptive move at a time.</i>		

Picture a tree tended to thrive in one particular setting. When the ground shifts, the branches can only hold what the roots can support. Most leadership development keeps adding branches; this work grows the roots, and deeper roots let the whole tree hold more.



Three words tell the difference:

Competencies <i>Your outer skills:</i> techniques, expertise, track record — the branches and fruit. What everyone sees, and what brought you here. We work towards visible outcomes!	Capability <i>Your inner power:</i> agency, discernment, how you make sense of things and stay grounded when the disruptions don't let up. The invisible roots that sustain the visible growth.	Capacity <i>Your scope and range:</i> how much you can hold, process, and offer to others by your grounded presence. With strong roots, the whole tree grows and spreads, thriving even in harsh conditions.
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New capability supports greater capacity producing necessary competency

WHAT THE WORK IS LIKE

This is the part most explanations skip, and it's usually what people most want to know.

Good coaching is a particular kind of relationship. In the work I do, it's serious *and* light-hearted at once, results-driven *and* genuinely relational, challenging *and* supportive in the same breath. You're met without judgment *and* pressed where it matters. I tend to work as a catalyst: attuned to the moment, curious rather than directive, present rather than performing expertise. The point isn't comfort, and it isn't toughness for its own sake. It's honest support at your growing edge, where real change happens.

In practice the work tends to land in a few familiar places. The reaction that fires before you've chosen it. The inner critic that's been running more of the show than you'd admit. The conversation you've been avoiding because you can't yet see how to have it well. The either/or you're stuck inside when the moment is asking for a both/and. We don't study these from a distance; we work them where they live, in the real situations you bring.

What that produces is a particular kind of seeing. The most common thing clients say afterward is some version of this: "Chris didn't try to fix me; he helped me see myself and what's around me."

FROM THE FIELD

"Chris has this knack for hearing my jumbled thoughts, reflecting them back in a way that helps me see patterns I had missed completely. He does not just listen; he challenges me to turn insights into actual plans and pushes me to stretch beyond what feels comfortable until these new approaches become second nature."

— Director of Innovation and Head of Cardiology, large midwestern healthcare system

Advice ends when the advisor leaves the room. This work sticks.

IS THIS YOU, AND IS THIS THE MOMENT?

Coaching isn't for everyone, or for every season. A few markers.

Three kinds of leaders tend to find their way here. The seasoned executive who mastered leading in stable conditions and now feels the old strengths producing less, in terrain that keeps shifting. The rising leader promoted for individual brilliance who is discovering that what won the role won't carry it, because the work now is about drawing capability out of others. And the leader in transition, in a season with no reliable map, where the question isn't which path to take but where to step next while the ground is still moving. If you recognize yourself (and your team) in one of these three – transitioning, emerging, experienced – you're in the right neighborhood.

It's likely for you if the instincts that built your success are producing diminishing returns; you're working harder and gaining less ground; you've outgrown advice and don't need another framework; or you sense that what you're facing is less about what you do than who you're being as a leader.

It's probably not the moment if what you need is a specific technical answer someone can simply give you; if you're looking for validation more than change; or if you're deep enough in acute crisis that you need stabilizing support first. None of that is failure. It's a different kind of help, and I'd rather tell you so you can gather the resources you need most in the moment.

The leaders who get the most from coaching come at the threshold, having noticed the gap and decided to cross it deliberately. What tends to hold us there isn't a lack of commitment. It's a quiet loyalty to the very thing that needs to change. Coaching is where you work directly in that gap.

Readiness isn't certainty. It's willingness: the willingness to be changed by what you learn, not only informed by it, and to keep working the insight after you leave the session. If that's stirring something as you read, that's a good signal.

WHAT COACHING EVOKES IN YOU

Presence	Judgment	Leadership
Under pressure that's real rather than performed.	That can sit with genuine ambiguity, not just manage it.	Your team can feel and trust when you're not in the room.

That last one matters most: the aim isn't a leader who performs better alone, but a leader who grows the capacity of everyone they serve. Leading yourself well turns out to be the prerequisite for all of it. You'll likely notice it first in small ways: a meeting you'd have dreaded that you walk into differently, a decision you'd have rushed that you let breathe, someone on your team who steps up because you finally stopped stepping in for them.

Underneath all of it sits a discipline I call *Practiced Discernment*, three questions a maturing leader learns to hold at once:

“What can I draw on that's required in this moment?”

“Is this what's needed most?”

“Is this mine to do?”

That third question is where heroic leadership ends and serving leadership begins: the difference between taking on everything because you can and stewarding yourself and others wisely. That comes over time because you're continually noticing and choosing what's yours to carry, handing off belongs to others, and helping them answer these three questions for themselves.

LET'S TALK

You're reading this because someone thought we might be a fit, or because something I wrote or said met you where you are. Either way, the next move is a free thirty-minute conversation. No agenda and no pitch, just what you're carrying and what it might look like to set some of it down. If it isn't right, I'll say so, and point you toward what is.

The Serving Way is a nonprofit, and fees run on a sliding scale from pro bono to market rate, so money isn't the thing that decides whether you do this work.

I'm Chris Thyberg, an ICF Professional Certified Coach and mentor coach to fellow coaches, trained at Georgetown's Institute for Transformational Leadership. I draw on graduate work in philosophy and thirty years leading strategic initiatives and team building in nonprofit and higher education. Now with over a decade focused fully on group leadership development and coaching individual executives and their teams, this is still the work I most want to be doing.

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Lead yourself well. Serve your great purpose.

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