

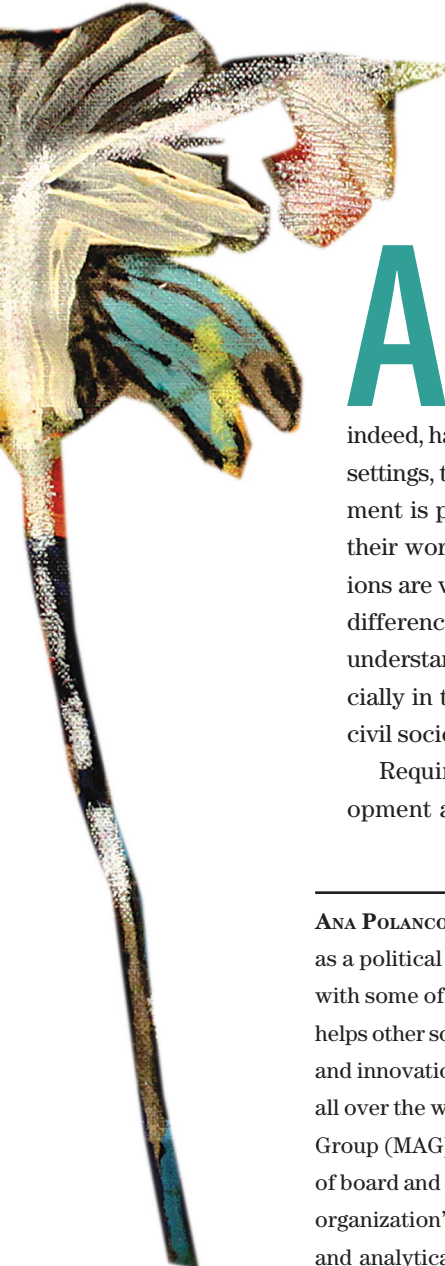
Emergent Coaching:

Becoming Nimble in Complex Times

by Ana Polanco and Susan Misra

*Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles,
and bark is not smooth, nor does lightning travel in a straight line.*

—Benoît B. Mandelbrot¹



AS THE OTHER ARTICLES IN THIS SERIES ABOUT human capital suggest, our assumptions about how work should be structured to be highly effective are changing—indeed, have changed—rapidly. Even in corporate settings, there is an acknowledgment that engagement is prized—that people want to know that their work matters and has meaning, their opinions are valued, and their work makes a positive difference. Yet, we are only on the threshold of understanding what this means in practice, especially in the complex, dynamic environments of civil society organizations.

Required are practices that support the development and advancement of the whole, while

supporting the development and advancement of the individuals who bring their intelligence, spirit, and experience to the organization. This can be accomplished in part through coaching, which is an emergent practice that focuses not just on upper-level management (as has often been the practice in the past) but also on developing staff at all levels.

Emergent coaching is not new, but it is being used differently to build capacity exponentially by helping to evolve the skills, instincts, and depth of the organization—characteristics that enable organizations to be more strategic and nimble, even under the most chaotic of circumstances.

ANA POLANCO is a New York-based international coach, speaker, and educator. Having spent over two decades as a political organizer, Polanco has helped advance the economic, social, and cultural rights of communities, with some of the most recognized organizations in the world. Today, as the founder of Polanco Consulting, she helps other socially conscious leaders catalyze change in their communities from a place of authenticity, purpose, and innovation. Polanco also serves on the faculty of Leadership that Works, an organization that trains people all over the world to fully empower themselves and others. **SUSAN MISRA**, codirector of Management Assistance Group (MAG), has worked with over two hundred nonprofit organizations and networks on leaderful practices of board and staff, complex systems change and strategy, and capacity building. Misra specializes in aligning an organization's internal operations and structure with its social justice values through inclusive, participatory, and analytically rigorous processes. Her work is grounded in three decades of activism to bring about love, dignity, and justice with an intersectional equity lens.

Who We Are

We are an Afro-Indigenous Latinx coach, facilitator, and trainer, working with movement leaders globally to reimagine conversations on social change, liberation, and leadership; and a queer South Asian coach, working with social change groups to truly live their values and advance love, dignity, and justice. Our work has involved learning about complex systems change and emergent strategy, and we began to reflect on how we use coaching to build adaptive capacity among individuals, organizations, and networks. We felt it was important to consult past leaders and previous clients on their coaching experiences, to understand how they were using coaching to navigate their complex and emergent environments.

There are many coaching program methods, but the interviewees we spoke with mostly used Leadership that Works' Coaching for Transformation model and CompassPoint's peer-coaching model.² Coaching for Transformation is one of the top international coaching programs, reaching a culturally diverse community of leaders from dozens of social change organizations and movements throughout the United States, India, Latin America, and Europe. These leaders continually influence this emergent coaching program, bringing to it tools and philosophies that grow our understanding of the Coaching for Transformation method and principles. The CompassPoint peer-coaching model is based on Carter McNamara's Authenticity Circles and the Fieldstone Leadership Network's Learning Groups.³ Many capacity builders such as TCC Group and Management Assistance Group (MAG) have trained nonprofits throughout the United States to use this model. Once it is adopted within an organization, it evolves organically as people learn and integrate other coaching practices.

Principles of Coaching That Align with Emergence and Complexity

Organizations are using coaching in different ways to foster flexibility and agility in these unpredictable and contentious times. Some organizations are using more traditional coaching models to help individual executives, managers, and directors strengthen their communication, leadership, and



By viewing people as whole and complete, coaching shifts from a one-size-fits-all problem-solving orientation to leveraging the unique, sustainable, and diverse resources and innovation that live inside every person.

INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWEES

Isela Gracian is the president of the East LA Community Corporation (ELACC). ELACC believes in accountable, community-driven development, equitable housing, transformation through socioeconomic justice, and building wealth through financial empowerment. ELACC builds grassroots leadership, develops affordable housing and neighborhood assets, and provides access to economic development opportunities for low- and moderate-income families in East L.A. and Boyle Heights.

Alexa Kasdan is the former director of research and policy at the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center. The Community Development Project provides legal, participatory research, and policy support to strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based groups in New York City to dismantle racial, economic, and social oppression.

Maria Rogers Pascual is executive director of Prospera. Prospera is an Oakland, California-based nonprofit that partners with low-income Latina immigrants to build co-ops—collectively owned local businesses—to transform communities and local economies, building prosperity for the benefit of all.

Nancy Smyth is the leadership development director of both the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) and Partnership for Working Families. LAANE is a nationally recognized advocacy organization dedicated to building a progressive labor movement for economic and racial justice. Combining dynamic research, innovative public policy, and strategic organizing of broad alliances, LAANE promotes a new economic approach based on good jobs, thriving communities, and a healthy environment. Partnership for Working Families is a national network of leading regional advocacy organizations that support innovative solutions to the nation's economic and environmental problems. They connect and enhance worker and community organizing, expand democracy, and combat poverty by raising job standards and addressing the needs of low-income communities.

culture-building skills. Other organizations are using coaching to strengthen, unify, and advance the adaptive-management skills of teams. Still others are taking key coaching skills and applying them to actual projects to help reimagine the outcomes, build resilience among project participants, and strengthen their connection and ability to manage conflict.

As coaches, we have been reflecting on our experience coaching hundreds of people and groups. We noticed a trend: when coaching broadens to a critical mass within a group, it can help build the group's capacity to navigate emergence and complexity. We wondered, what is it about coaching that supports this capacity? As we thought about this question, we were inspired by *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, by adrienne maree brown, and *The Systems Grantmaking Resource Guide*, by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and Management Assistance Group.⁴ There are five principles of emergence and complexity outlined in these resources that we saw reflected in the types of coaching that were having a transformative impact across individuals, organizations, networks, and communities. These five principles are:

- Wholeness
- Ferning
- Pattern recognition and change
- Starlings, shocks, and landslides
- Nonlinearity

Through our interviews with nonprofit leaders who are using coaching in different ways, we discovered how these principles are brought to life with staff, members, and partners, and explored how important they are to being able to navigate complexity and emergence.

Wholeness

The concept of wholeness posits that people are already whole and complete—that they are filled with endless resources for solving the challenges they face. By viewing people as whole and complete, coaching shifts from a one-size-fits-all problem-solving orientation to leveraging the unique, sustainable, and diverse resources and innovation that live inside every person.

The intersectional identities that make up our true self are not segmented pieces like a jigsaw puzzle but more blurred and blended to form a whole picture. This self is an expression of histories: lineages that came before us, systems and cultures in which we are located, and experiences we have had. Coaching helps us to access a deeper awareness of our self—our mind, body, and spirit—so that we can uncover the roots of our emotions and experiences, and the ways that we protect ourselves from accessing this wholeness.

In other words, coaching supports people in exploring their identity, wholeness, and evolution to a way of being in the world that engages more of their whole self. For Maria Rogers Pascual of Prospera, for example:

Integrity of our humanity is central to our programs. We are more than business owners. We are also moms and immigrants. We recognize our whole story, and that means understanding we are connected to the larger complex financial system that is based on gender and racial oppression. So we want to make sure that we acknowledge our own powerful history of entrepreneurship in the face of this oppressive system. Money is about justice and recuperating our voice.⁵

In this way, in its programs Prospera uses coaching with Latina entrepreneurs to support their analysis of their world view and their agency to make choices about their lived experiences in a way that embraces their full identity and power. The coaching can often be quite healing and transformative, because it unearths the entrepreneurs' hidden resources and insights, even in the face of the trauma of oppression.

Similarly for ELACC, coaching "is not only about the hard-skill building but also about the transformational piece of individuals." As Isela Gracian explains:

If we aren't intentional about supporting both—the technical ability to implement the work and personal development—they aren't successful in their project.

For example, an ELACC staff member was struggling with writing a report, even though he understood the mechanics underlying such writing as espoused by the organization. The coaching process helped him to explore the linkages among his identity, writing, and the organization's identity, giving him the space to activate his whole self and surface the unspoken challenges of writing for an organization with a different cultural identity and set of assumptions from his own.

Ferning—or Embracing the Simple Order in Complexity

Complexity can look like chaos until you identify the ordering central forms. This rule is central to complexity theory, and refers to universal aspects of a system that are replicated at various levels to form a whole that replicates the parts but still retains a uniqueness from any other similar entity—a randomness. That randomness emanates from the differences in the parts as they make up the whole. In some literature, this effect of the parts on the whole is called "ferning." Ferns are a form that replicates a simple shape from its most elemental part to its entirety, yet no fern is exactly like another fern—and no part is exactly like any other. These concepts are inextricably linked to the idea of individual and organizational wholeness, in that purpose and a drive for purpose are often what align the parts in a system—what is alike about us. This could be a yearning for justice around an issue, associated with a drive to a particular outcome—but it is what is shared and drives us to coordinate our work ever more effectively. Thus, we will see similar characteristics reflected in different parts of the whole, including individuals, teams, organizations, and communities. We will also see ripples across these parts as systems adapt—cascading from small to large and large to small, since some randomness and variation also occur from one level to the next, and because sometimes forms change in response to their environments.

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As the organization gets clearer about its transformational goals, individual coaching provides a space for people to explore what this means for them individually and to challenge themselves to undergo their own equity journey.

Traditionally, people have focused on using coaching to strengthen individual performance, which, in turn, strengthens organizational outcomes; but there are four other ways that we have seen the principle of fanning show up in our coaching practice.

First, a critical mass of individuals adopting norms and practices that support organizational or community transformation can emerge. Nancy Smyth of LAANE shared:

There is something about scale—when a lot of people are doing inner work—and how it can influence the organization . . . and help shift the culture. Training people in coaching skills contributes to conscious relationships, curiosity, deep listening, believing in people’s capacity, letting go, and lots of experiments.

ELACC, also, has introduced coaching skills to all staff. According to Gracian:

The team sees and understands that we are creating an environment of learning, thinking, and growing. . . . [Sharing with all staff fosters] mutual accountability; staff need to be honest, transparent, and have brave conversations with folks.

Prospera’s members also received one-on-one coaching, and are trained in such coaching skills as the three levels of listening: *self-focused*, *other-focused*, and *transformational*. Collectively, Prospera is able to bring peer coaching to all members in the community. As Pascual said, “They become arbiters and facilitators with the other women—[helping people] work and collaborate together.”

Second, information and interpretations from the parts can emerge more as a ripple, moving from powerful, individual inquiry to team or organizational questions that, when raised, lead to or support change processes. At Community Development Project, coaching was paired with a management training initiative. Alexa Kasdan explained:

Coaching was the place where individuals could practice [and explore] the problems or challenges they were having at work

[and] get clear about whether the organization aligned to their values. . . . [It] allowed lots of blind spots to become visible. . . . The work we did created a ripple effect to bigger changes—to call to question issues of equity, inclusion, strategy, and even roles.

At LAANE, training the entire team to use coaching principles created more authentic conversations leading to changes in performance. “There are teams where coaching is about how they do their work—like the organizing team,” said Smyth. She noted:

Where there is a “shadow” [i.e., something that’s not working on a team or in the organization] identified in coaching, it can lead to the person bringing it back to the team space and the team reflecting, digging in, and doing the change work together.

For example, an interviewee shared an experience in which a person being coached became aware of how her rigidity was eliciting a negative reaction from her peers. By shifting her perspective, she was able to transform relationships and build trust. Then, when a group conflict arose later on, she had a different way of approaching it that resolved the conflict and built more trust among the team.

Third, the same principle of parts to the whole and whole to the parts can show up when organizational change processes are coupled with individual coaching to support people in their own transformation (essentially, rippling from other levels to the individual). Within the social sector, we have found this to be a common part of a deep equity-transformation process. As the organization gets clearer about its transformational goals, individual coaching provides a space for people to explore what this means for them individually and to challenge themselves to undergo their own equity journey. As an example, coaching for one woman of color helped her to confront internalized oppression and develop the grounding and confidence to set boundaries with program partners and speak up with friends when her identity was devalued.

Fourth and finally, these principles of

self-organization can look like multiple individuals or teams embodying organizational principles, values, and unique ways of being in both good and bad times. At Prospera, cooperative members reflect the organization's vision, values, competencies, and ways of being. While each member discovers her own unique journey to transformation, all of these individual experiences add up to organizational alignment. Prospera embraces a Mayan principle that is reflected in many coaching models: *In Lak'Ech*, which means "I am your other you and you are my other me." This principle is a true reflection of ferning, as it reinforces the idea that, like an organization's members, all the leaves of a fern are connected and have shared responsibility to one another.

By doing the inner work and working on performance in coaching, organizational members build up a new capacity to hold space in times of conflict, generate unexpected growth, and leverage idea generation. When Prospera's cooperative members disagree or show up in ways that are not aligned with their leadership values, they don't have to wait for the coach or executive director to step in. Instead, all organizational participants have the capacity, skills, and agency to coach one another, promote the organization's values, and as a result advance the organization's mission. This, in turn, informs how the mission evolves and generates more alignment and more capacity to move the mission forward in ways that are generative, iterative, and transformational.

Pattern Recognition and Change

There is much debate about the number of thoughts we have in a single day—scientific studies put it in a range of fifteen thousand to seventy thousand per day. Whatever the number might be, we aren't aware of a majority of these thoughts because the brain, much like nature, creates patterns of behavior in response to the environment. We have diminished awareness of these patterns over time because they help us to meet basic social needs and confront and cope with the complexity of life's daily challenges. So, when an individual begins to do inner work, he or she can often have one agenda and, through inner work, discover that there is a deeper and more

transformative agenda yielding different results. The same goes for organizations.

Coaching expands coachees' awareness of their own patterned behavior under current conditions, and enables them to alter those patterns as the situation changes. Individuals engage mind, body, and spirit to deepen their understanding of how the roots of their experiences and emotions inform their leadership at work and at home. This pattern recognition is critical to an individual's resourcefulness in changing these patterns, and is not based on someone else's lived experiences. Where coachees become aware of their patterns and their source, it creates enough space to choose whether to make a new choice or begin building the capacity to make new choices.

For leaders Pascual and Gracian, becoming deeply aware of their emotional and behavioral patterns through coaching helped their organizations recognize that creating permanent change around the patterns of behavior was much more nuanced than just trying to fix surface problems. For example, when a leader recognizes that she has a problem building trust, through coaching she may also recognize the need for safety in relationships. This helps the coachee acknowledge the ethos she aspires to and how her current pattern of behavior might prevent that from manifesting.

For the Community Development Project's leadership team—who underwent a process of coaching combined with management training—awareness of individual patterns increased the team members' ability to ask for help when they were stuck on a problem. As Kasdan noted, opening up that opportunity helped contribute to increased collaboration between team members and a shift in how problems were solved in some key areas.

Another interviewee shared how one leader was struggling with time management, which was affecting his ability to build successful relationships with other leaders. Coaching helped him to become aware of this pattern and the ways in which it was affecting many other aspects of his life, including getting his kids to school on time. This inspired him to make a choice about the kind of leader and role model he wanted to be in his

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community, and he ended up shifting his behavior both at work and with his family, leading to more harmonious, collaborative, and successful relationships all around.

In another example, a leadership team member acknowledged the difficulty she was having engaging in personal conversations during check-ins with other team members instead of getting right into the business at hand. Creating awareness around this issue helped her to change direction and make space for more casual conversation at the beginning of each check-in, which allowed her to build a better working relationship with team members.

While pattern recognition is an important part of the change process in coaching, it is not a guarantee that change will be permanent. Smyth has described seeing both “snapback and permanent” change. Many of our interviewees spoke about the difficulty of permanent change around behavioral patterns, particularly those tied to personal trauma and systemic oppression. Kasdan noted that “how deeply rooted” an issue is can affect the capacity for new patterns to take hold. Our interviewees also noted that readiness and desire to change are aspects of the change process that affect permanence.

As more and more nonprofits begin to address and uplift the value of equity and inclusion in the workplace and to tackle systemic power and privilege issues in the coaching process, it’s important that coaches be prepared to recognize their own patterns of behavior in order to avoid colluding with those systemic patterns during the change process. In order to support others to make authentic choices around power and privilege, coaches, managers, and peers must work on their own beliefs about power and privilege to support transformation in themselves and in others. As Pascual noted, “We can’t talk about transformation if we don’t understand our relationship to power.”

Starlings, Shocks, and Landslides

The naming of a pattern can lead to “Aha!” moments (also known as transformations); we think of such moments as *starlings*, *shocks*, or *landslides*.⁶ The idea of *starlings* derives from the swooping and spinning together in

unpredictable patterns (known as murmurations) that happens when hundreds of starlings shift their flight at once. *Shocks* are abrupt and unexpected changes. *Landslides* are slow shifts that lead to permanent change. When multiple people in a system experience an “Aha!” moment, those individual transformations can cause them to shift and reconfigure how they approach change within the system—and this, in turn, leads to “Aha!” moments (starlings, shocks, or landslides) at other levels (such as teams, organizations, and communities).

“Aha!” moments are rarely about sustainability and more about nonlinear change. In coaching, recognition of these “Aha!” moments can create opportunities to open up choice, self-reflection, and experimentation with new ways of being. The more an individual practices change and experiments with new behavior, the more resiliency and recovery she can generate to engage in authentic dialogue and transformative change within herself and inside the organization.

A critical mass of individuals being coached or using coaching principles to change how programs are delivered can generate the kind of collective “Aha!” moments we desire. The more people experience transformation, the more agility teams and communities have, like starlings, to reconfigure and change direction in the face of change. This ability can significantly affect the pace of change, as well. In one example, coaching enabled individuals to see patterns of misalignment between how leaders behave and organizational values. Individuals made choices to shift those patterns. Slowly, there were new roles and different meetings, and then there was the rapid creation of a new leadership team.

Powerful transformation can result by giving all the members of an organization a shared set of coaching tools, resources, and language with which to create—but they can’t be used in a vacuum. Pascual noted that a person’s cultural identities, past traumas, power, privilege, economic mobility, and the stability or not of his or her immigration status are born from a set of institutions, systems, and structures that impact how we experience our ability to change in relationship to the larger world context. As

Kasdan explained, the people undergoing the change must be aware of and understand the societal realities in which they operate—and a coach, too, must understand that transformation is happening in the context of those historic and present-day societal realities, and be prepared to work with them.

Coaches and peer coaches inside organizations, stressed Kasdan, must be well trained and prepared to navigate trauma and inequity in order to create transformation in ways that are meaningful, build toward agility, and encourage individual and collective change. In this way, organizational leaders should be clear about the purpose of using coaching and what other skills are needed to advance and build toward transformation. Some examples of complementary skills may include understanding equity and inclusion frameworks, learning trauma-informed ways of communicating with others, and tapping into other skill sets that encourage recognition of others' individual experiences and assumptions. By having multiple skills, a professional or peer coach may be better able to support others in moving from temporary transactional changes to transformational change, which can have a lasting effect on the individual and the group.

Nonlinearity

Nonlinearity means that things happen in unpredictable and seemingly irrational ways. What works today may not work tomorrow, new behaviors may not become permanent habits and mind-sets, and there may be larger-than-expected, smaller-than-expected, or even just unexpected results from implemented strategies. Nonlinearity applies to coaching in three ways.

First, coaching itself evolves in nonlinear ways. Half of the organizations interviewed developed coaching plans with intended outcomes, while the other half did not specify expected results in advance. At the same time, all of the interviewees agreed with Smyth that they were “not attached to what people do—but to] challenging them if they were not moving into what they wanted to change.” As Gracian shared, “I tell people it is a practice. There are moments when

they may not do it, [and] we call them back into a practice. It is not one time or an endpoint but an ongoing [body of work].” Coaching also creates the space for people to grow in ways that might be unexpected. One interviewee, for instance, noted that coaching had led to several people choosing to leave their positions. Another interviewee talked about how a coachee decided to close down her business in order to start another business that was more aligned with her purpose.

Second, the length of time it takes to see the results of coaching can be unpredictable and inconsistent. Going back to the example of the staff member who wanted to work on the issue of timeliness, through the coaching he realized very quickly that constantly being late derived from an unconscious desire for getting attention, and he was able to identify more positive ways to get that attention. Another interviewee shared an example of someone who spent a few years working on embracing a more curious stance, and it wasn't until he went through formal coaching training that it finally clicked for him and he was able to evolve. But all of the interviewees agreed with Kasdan that when coaching is implemented for several people at once, the results can be simultaneously slow and fast, or can happen in waves. Further, there may be a gap between when the coaching impact is felt by the person being coached and when it is felt by the organization, network, and community. As Pascual observed, individual transformation may be noted more readily than new group habits and norms.

Third, coaching builds people's ability to embrace emergence and be flexible and nimble as things change. As Kasdan described it, coaching can result in staff having “a higher capacity and resilience to respond to chaotic change. . . . [Coaching] helps people become more open to asking for help—that in and of itself provides agility.” Pascual remarked, “It's not simple to stay grounded despite our best efforts. [Members are] learning a new language, changing migration status, and navigating the U.S. system to generate stable income and housing. . . . [Coaching] changes how [they] listen to friends and family members [and how they] flex that muscle in conversations.” Smyth also works in unpredictable situations, and

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Coaches are continually learning about their identity and power and how these impact the coaching process. As Pascual reflected, “We can’t talk about transformation if we don’t understand our relationship to power, where it came from, and prejudices—how I can be oppressed and how I can oppress others.”

she has used peer coaching to help “women find their power and voice. . . . Coaching [enables us] to have courageous conversations and authentic relationships in our coalitions and with partners, helps people understand each other more, and [helps people] take a stand with each other.”

As Gracian noted, it is particularly important for staff to continually challenge assumptions, test what is working now, and continue to move forward in an environment of rapid change:

The coaching method really helps people have an internal shift to the brain . . . and cultivates people’s ability to manage [their] challenges. . . . [For] newer staff that are used to being in spaces where they are told what to do . . . the process of coaching helps build this [self-led] capacity.

As a result of coaching multiple staff, Gracian continued, more people are becoming willing to take risks. “What I’m seeing right now is there is a lot of energy to pilot work, noodle through, and push the boundaries of existing programs.” She concluded, “Part of the coaching is getting people to manage what they are feeling around making decisions. . . . There [was] nervousness around making decisions, being wrong, and making mistakes. . . . [Now] if I’m not there or not available, I’ve noticed they connect with each other, ask each other questions, and can move forward with a decision.”

How Does a Coach Show Up for the Most Effective Coaching?

The five principles outlined above are not sufficient for coaching to support emergence and complexity. What we learned from the interviews is that the intention with which an organization or individual approaches coaching also matters. There were three themes around this coach’s “stand” that were common across all the coaches we interviewed and that we have seen in our own work: *consideration of power and privilege; mindfulness of multiple ways of knowing; and openheartedness and curiosity.*

The coach’s “stand”—or, foundation from which a person coaches—is a higher purpose and commitment that a coach embodies in order to

support the client’s exploration of change, free from the coach’s own experience. These commitments often take physical, visual, intellectual, spiritual, and/or energetic form, and support coaches in managing their own biases and expectations for transformative change. In this way, a coach’s perspective on cultural identity, racial equity, engaging in multiple forms of knowing, and ability to embrace deep curiosity and inner work are critical.

First, *coaches explicitly consider power and privilege.* Coaches are continually learning about their identity and power and how these impact the coaching process. As Pascual reflected, “We can’t talk about transformation if we don’t understand our relationship to power, where it came from, and prejudices—how I can be oppressed and how I can oppress others.” A coach will likely talk about this explicitly with the person he or she is coaching to make sure they are a good fit in terms of cultural understanding and power dynamics. In some cases, coaches may reveal aspects of themselves to support the people they are coaching in challenging assumptions and exploring different questions. For instance, Gracian sometimes shares her story of growing up working class and learning to be invisible while helping to clean homes, and how she has challenged what she was taught in order to become more visible. In addition, coaches support the person they are coaching to become more grounded in terms of their identity and in relation to systems of oppression. As Smyth stressed:

I support people in being in their authentic selves and not having to code-switch. I work with people to be in their true stand and power so they can bring all they want to bring and challenge systems of oppression.

Second, *coaches are mindful of multiple ways of knowing beyond the brain’s problem-solving capabilities,* which we know are slow. Instead, coaches who embrace multiple ways of knowing access other forms of energy to help clients discover their own insights. Metaphors, intuition, somatics, art, and other spiritual or creative fields help coaches to access what clients think they don’t know. “Like a windmill,” as Smyth said,

“there is a whimsical and intuitive feel to coaching—and coaching done well generates energy and movement.” At Partnership for Working Families, it feels like this is the water in which all staff are swimming, and they are aligning the inner work of the staff with the energy of the network. The more time coachees spend accessing multiple forms of knowing, the deeper their awareness becomes of their own transformation as a process. Gracian also spoke to this: “Supporting transformation is part of the recipe, and opening one’s ability to sense energy and observe a person” is an important condition of successful coaching.

Third and finally, *coaches are open-hearted, curious learners*. They hold people who are being coached with compassion, understanding that individual transformation is deep work and that it is important for people being coached to embrace learning and a willingness to pick themselves back up after stumbling, and try again. They are mindful of creating spaces where people feel comfortable sharing their truth and taking risks. Coaches who embrace deep curiosity are not trying to fix, judge, or advise their clients; instead, they are focused on the process of helping people to uncover opportunities, honor their cultural experiences, discover hidden resources, and develop their own solutions.



The examples we have shared demonstrate that coaching is being used in many different ways within nonprofit organizations, networks, and communities. The innovations certainly go beyond traditional models of coaching for leadership development and performance improvement. As more nonprofits explore living their values around equity and inclusion, coaching combined with training on systemic oppression, power, and privilege offers organizations the opportunity to grow and deepen their mission by recognizing the leadership of women of color and other stakeholders who have traditionally been excluded. The future will bring many more innovations and much more development of coaching across the sector. This article is only a snapshot

of part of what we have experienced and heard so far. The field and our understanding of it will continue to evolve.

NOTES

1. Benoît B. Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1977).
2. “Coaching for Transformation,” Leadership that Works, accessed August 21, 2018, www.leadershipthatworks.com/Public/CoachTraining/; “About Us,” Leadership that Works, accessed August 20, 2018, www.leadershipthatworks.com/Public/AboutUs/index.cfm; “Looking for a Coach?,” Leadership that Works, accessed August 21, 2018, www.leadershipthatworks.com/Public/Coaching/FindaCoach/; and see Judith Wilson and Michelle Gislason, *Coaching Skills for Nonprofit Managers and Leaders: Developing People to Achieve Your Mission* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).
3. Carter McNamara, *Authenticity Circles Program Developer’s Guide: A Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Peer Coaching Group Programs* (Minneapolis: Authenticity Consulting, 2001); and “Learning Groups,” Fieldstone Leadership Network, accessed August 21, 2018, fieldstoneleadership.org/learning-groups/.
4. adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017); and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and Management Assistance Group, *Systems Grantmaking Resource Guide* (Washington, DC: Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and Management Assistance Group, 2016).
5. All quotes are from interviews conducted by the authors between February and May 2018, unless otherwise noted.
6. The concept of *shocks* and *landslides* is inspired by the work of Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project. The concept of *starlings* is inspired by our own birdwatching, and the following article by George F. Young et al.: “Starling Flock Networks Manage Uncertainty in Consensus at Low Cost,” *PLOS Computational Biology* 9, no. 1 (January 31, 2013).

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Coaches who embrace deep curiosity are not trying to fix, judge, or advise their clients; instead, they are focused on the process of helping people to uncover opportunities, honor their cultural experiences, discover hidden resources, and develop their own solutions.

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