



A JOURNEY TO
EXCELLENCE
IN PRACTICE



As a fast-paced government agency, open communication is essential to navigating the constant flow of assignments at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). To help solve the numerous challenges faced in this high-stakes environment, DIA established a coaching program available to every employee to accelerate leader development, increase productivity, and change the workplace culture.

DIA is the primary manager and producer of foreign military intelligence for the United States. The organization produces, analyzes, and disseminates critical information during peacetime, crises, and war. Staffed with over 16,500 employees, each team member is expected to embody the agency's values of Excellence, Teamwork, Integrity, Initiative, and Accountability every day, regardless of the pressures of their work.

“Coaching fits with the culture,” remarks Dr. Theodora Fitzsimmons, PCC, DIA Coaching Program Chief. “It fits with the mission, which is basically all about communication, and the more we increase the ability of people to listen, slow down and ask good questions, the better we are.”

In recognition of DIA's government coaching program, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) named the organization a finalist for the 2019 ICF International Prism Award. The Prism Award program honors organizations that have achieved the highest standard of excellence in coaching programs that yield discernible and measurable positive impacts, fulfill rigorous professional standards, address key strategic goals, and shape organizational culture. (Learn more at coachfederation.org/prism-award.)

Developing Leaders from Within

Before the launch of an official coaching program at DIA, external coaches were provided to senior leaders, with less than 100 individuals per year

receiving coaching. The impact of this initial coaching program quickly became evident as those receiving coaching communicated universal positive feedback and additional employees expressed a desire to experience coaching for themselves.

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*Dr. Theodora Fitzsimmons, PCC
DIA Coaching Program Chief*

As DIA assessed this demand, leadership became convinced that an internal coaching program had much more potential to accelerate leadership development and shift the culture across the organization. The opportunity to test this approach came when Richard Herrick, Division Chief, Enterprise Training Management, Academy for Defense Intelligence at DIA, received an innovation grant in 2014.

With these funds, the organization invested from within by training 22 internal leaders to become Certified Professional Coaches (CPC). This initial investment created a ripple effect throughout the agency, with leaders using their new coaching skills not only in one-on-one coaching sessions, but also to inform their engagement with their direct teams.

Because the response to the pilot program of internal coaches was overwhelmingly positive, DIA expanded its program to reach more employees. Additional funding was made available to train up to 500 coaches by 2021. To date, more than 380 employees have been trained as internal coaches, more than 215 of whom have completed the CPC requirements through an ICF-approved training program. Additionally, 35 of these trained coaches have received their ICF Associate Certified Coach (ACC) Credential.

With this approach, DIA has turned coaching into an agency-wide benefit for all employees, reaching at least 2,000 individuals each year to date.

Prioritizing Ethics and Continued Training

Maintaining high standards is a top priority for DIA, and that applies to its coaching practices. To keep coaching relationships separate from working relationships, DIA does not permit one-on-one coaching between employees and their supervisors. Instead, they encourage supervisors to use coaching techniques with their teams, but direct employees to seek out individual coaching from other qualified leaders in the agency.

DIA also prioritizes continued coach training, mentoring, and supervision to sustain and enhance coaches’ capabilities. “We’re training coaches, we’re supporting them with more training,” says Fitzsimmons. “Once they become a coach, they become an agency asset...We want [one-on-one] coaching and team coaching to occur organically wherever it’s needed.”

The DIA Coaching Program requires all coaches to attend three learning events per year from their DIA Coach Continuing Education ICF-approved curriculum, as well as a minimum of 24 hours of coaching per year. One of the courses offered is advanced competency training, which focuses specifically on ICF Core Competencies.

DIA also provides a Services Series, through which DIA’s internal coaches meet with staff from the other helping arms of the organization—such as the Ombudsman, the Office of General Council and Alternate Dispute Resolution. This two-way education series equips coaches to help the employees they coach connect to additional resources DIA offers while also educating employees in DIA’s other service arms about what the organization’s coaches have to offer. The series has established a strong relationship among these partners to address the needs of every DIA employee.

A Measurable Transformation

DIA places great emphasis on results and takes care to establish methods to assess the impact of its internal coaching as perceived by both the coach and the coachee. An assessment survey given to internal coaches indicated a very positive impact on the agency. Of the coaches surveyed, 100 percent agreed

that coaching skills have affected their leadership performance, 99.9 percent agreed that coaching skills have improved their relationships with their direct reports, and 88 percent agreed that coaching skills have improved their relationship with their peers.

Another impact survey measured the perceived benefits for the coachees. Of those receiving the coaching, 97.8 percent indicated they were satisfied with the coaching they received, 97.8 percent agreed coaching was a transformational experience, and 98.9 percent felt they had more skills for success as a result of coaching.

“We have turned this into a powerful program for the agency,” says Herrick. “We have made an effort to train somebody as a coach in each of our commands around the world, so it’s not just Washington, DC. We are all around the world supporting wherever DIA is with leadership training and coaching assistance. And we’re hearing the same feedback from our coaches around the world about how powerful this has been.”

An Example to Model for Other Agencies

Coaching at DIA has positively influenced the organization since the program’s inception. Demand from employees exceeded availability, prompting DIA to continue to grow the program to make coaching available across the organization. In correlation with the coaching program, DIA has experienced lower employee turnover, higher employee satisfaction, and increased leader development.

“As leaders, we are constantly learning,” says Herrick. “We’re constantly reading about how we could lead better, and in the process, coach better. The things that

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*Richard Herrick
Division Chief, Enterprise Training Management,
Academy for Defense Intelligence at DIA*

you would want to see in a good coach, you want to see in a good leader. And those are the things that we bring in and teach at the Defense Intelligence Agency.” 🙌

In 2020, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) celebrates 25 years as the global organization for coaches and coaching. ICF is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high ethical standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches across a variety of coaching disciplines. Its 35,000-plus members located in 143 countries work toward the common goal of enhancing awareness of coaching, upholding the integrity of the profession, and continually educating themselves with the newest research and practices.



coachfederation.org

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