

MACHINE COACHES • ROBOT MENTORS • AI ASSISTANTS • S.T.E.M. VS. S.T.E.A.M.

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the magazine of professional coaching



TECHNOLOGY &

AI

*Will it support or replace
human coaching?*

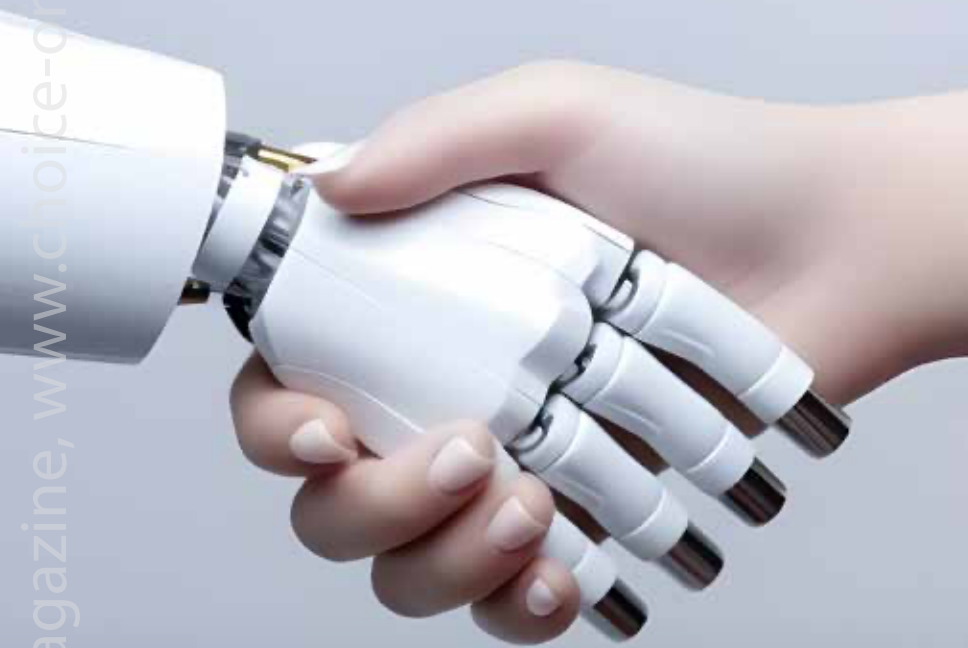
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WILL IT SUPPORT
OR REPLACE HUMAN
COACHING?

What is artificial intelligence (AI), and how does it impact coaching? Where does AI exist now in the coaching profession? Is it helping or hurting the impact? Should coaches fear or welcome AI? Can AI replace person-to-person coaching? Join us as we explore the ways in which AI affects coaching now, and what the future holds.





AI MENTOR

How artificial intelligence can support coaches' professional development

By Carla Benedetti, PCC

When asked about their experience of becoming a professional coach, many coaches say that reaching the end of their training program is an emotional moment. They start feeling a sense of nostalgia mixed with the pressure of starting a new business – or, if they are internal coaches, promoting their new set of skills within their company.

Especially at the beginning, keeping ourselves focused on our practice and feeling confident about our ability to coach can be challenging.

Those who intend to gain an ICF credential receive at least one cycle of mentor coaching sessions. Others may hire a mentor coach for a few sessions to get some useful feedback. In any case, the process is limited to a short amount of time. After that, it's mainly learning by practice, which means a lot of time spent before raising the standard.

What I have learned, over many years of experience, is that in order to really grow with confidence from the very beginning, coaches need continuous feedback, and feedback from professional

mentors is expensive. Peer coaching and community practice are valuable ways to learn from each other. Still, a specific, evidence-based mentoring system for coaching is missing.

Could technology assist coaches in getting that support? Artificial intelligence is entering the world of coaching in different ways. The mobile apps and platforms are available focused on two main areas:

- Marketplace and productivity platforms;
- AI powered coaching.

Marketplace and productivity platforms use AI to match coaches with potential clients according to topic, industry, country, experience, etc. They also usually offer other tools and services to manage the business administration. Some of the most popular of these are BetterUp, CoachHub and CoachingLoft.

These platforms have in some way democratized coaching by offering a huge portfolio of international coaches at accessible prices, while creating a business growth opportunity for coaches.

AI-powered coaching applications are different. They are basically chatbots using AI to converse with a client on different business and personal topics such as action plan, self reflection, behavior monitoring. Some examples are: Sally Digital business coach, The GoodLife Ai and CoachEm.

This type of AI-powered coaching can be useful in simple tasks, where AI can respond easily, but it cannot replace a real coach. Machines can learn how to imitate humans, but cannot learn to be human.

In my search for the best AI coaching tool, I could not find a model focused on coaching skills, providing detailed, objective feedback on a coach's performance. That's when I decided to build it myself with my technical team.

My experience as a mentor helped me to design the concept and the first model. After months of intense research, development and testing, I have launched THeach, a new AI-driven

tool that helps coaches improve their performance. It's the first of its kind – the first Mentor-Coaching System – and I trust that it will revolutionize the coaching profession.

The first version could analyze the transcript of a coaching session uploaded by the coach and provide a feedback. The new version can generate the transcript from an audio or video file before sending the result to AI for a feedback report. This allows for better user experience and even more accurate and detailed results.

HOW IT WORKS

AI language analysis is usually executed on one single text, but with THeach, we ask the machine to analyze the conversation between two persons: the coach and the client. In seconds, the coach receives a report on coaching competences based on the International Coaching Federation (ICF) guidelines and best practices. It is a quite complex process, and a complete new perspective.

During our testing, several times I have been asked: “Why can't we use artificial intelligence to analyze the audio recording directly? This would avoid the creation of a transcript, and the process would be faster.”

It is a good question, and I see the point, but such a model is not yet available. Though we are surrounded by all sort of technology that makes everything looks very simple, to this day AI speech recognition cannot analyze dynamics criteria in speech, it can only create a transcript that is not 100 percent accurate. This becomes even more challenging when it has to transcribe a two-person conversation.

The best speech recognition programs from IBM, Otter, Amazon, Google and Microsoft can reach 90 to 95 percent accuracy, and we are talking the most sophisticated models that have been instructed to recognize content/words and variations in one speaker's voice.

Can you imagine how difficult it would be for a machine to deal with a coaching session where two people are engaged in a conversation, with

variations in both voices in terms of tonalities, emotions, rhythm, etc.? The outcome of the analysis – the feedback for the coach – would not be reliable. And without using a transcript as a validation, we could not even know what conversation the machine has really analyzed. Skipping the transcript is a goal of the future.

Back to THeach, once the automatic transcript from an audio or video recording is ready, you can review it in case some editing is needed. This is useful at the beginning; then, the more you use it, the less you need to edit. Machines learn, after all.

By the way, going through the session transcript is a great exercise to increase awareness about our coaching presence and skills, but that is another story.

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WHAT ELSE IS NEW ABOUT THeach?

Coaching effectiveness is usually validated through the client's assessment – or self assessment – taken before and after the program. Though this methodology gives us a good understanding of the client's progress, we still cannot tell whether that was the best possible intervention.

For example, how often – especially at the beginning of your career as coach – have you found yourself doubting your client's willingness to go deep into the coaching exploration? You might have noticed some resistance in moving forward, the sessions seemed to loop, or maybe your client's answers had not much to do with your questions. Your conclusion was that the client was not ready to be coached.

But what if, due to lack of experience, or personal thinking, internal dialogue or bias, you did not realize that your client was just waiting for the right

question? You were missing something and did not even notice.

The AI driven mentor-coaching system provides feedback on a variety of skills, including:

- Percentage of time that the coach talks;
- Similarity of language between the coach and the client;
- Key words used by both parties;
- Types of questions the coach asks.

Feedback is presented with graphics and comments to help coaches observe their session using an evidence-based approach. It is a private reflection, aimed at self development.

One of the things that sets the app apart is its objective feedback. Because

it's driven by AI, there's no room for personal bias or subjectivity. This makes it an invaluable resource for coaches looking to improve and grow in their profession. The coach is able to actually notice what really happened in the coaching sessions.

But THeach doesn't stop there. It also offers features like session-by-session skill monitoring, report storage in client folders, personal reflection tools, and resources to delve into relevant topics.

We're constantly working on further development, and we have big plans for the future. One of our goals is to make THeach available in more languages by September 2023.

If you're a coach looking to take your skills to the next level, I encourage you to try the app for free. And if you wish to be part of our new community, let us know. We will be happy to welcome *choice* Magazine readers with a special starting pack. ●