



# From Grassroots to Global: Coaching at SAP

Headquartered in Walldorf, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, with 130 offices around the globe and 200,000-plus customers in more than 190 countries, SAP is a multinational organization specializing in enterprise software for business management and customer relationship management (CRM).

In 2003, a group of managers at SAP sought coach-specific training to enhance their own communication skills, emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationships. After training, they began coaching colleagues' direct reports, and a movement took hold in the organization. Today, SAP's Global Coaching Practice (GCP) aligns with International Coach Federation (ICF) standards, transcends international boundaries and has the support of leaders across the organization.

In recognition of SAP's exceptional and sustained use of coaching, the International Coach Federation (ICF) awarded it with an honorable mention in the 2015 ICF International Prism Award program. 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 about the award at [Coachfederation.org/prism](https://Coachfederation.org/prism).)

## A Path to Success

SAP offers a clear training and career path for internal coaches to ensure that they meet high professional standards and are empowered to provide outstanding service to the individuals they coach. Since 2010, SAP's human resources division has managed the GCP. That same year, the organization decided to adopt ICF standards for the GCP.

SAP's GCP Program Office oversees day-to-day administration and ensures that ICF's high standards are met across the GCP. To be added to GCP's database of coaches, a practitioner must supply proof of an ICF Credential or proof of extensive coaching experience and 128-plus hours of coach-specific training. GCP coaches also sign a written agreement to abide by the ICF Code of Ethics and to SAP's GCP Quality Guidelines, which were developed in alignment with ICF's Core Competencies.

Coaching is available to everyone in the organization, regardless of seniority, level or job functions. Employees



interested in partnering with a coach use an in-house, online matching tool to select a coach; this process helps ensure anonymity and, by extension, confidentiality.

GCP coaches are classified according to their experience, expertise and skill, providing additional rigor for the program and offering internal coach practitioners a clear professional development path:

- SAP Junior Coaches have 128-plus hours of coach-specific training and a verified log of coaching experience. (Alternately, a practitioner may achieve this position with evidence of a current ICF Credential.)
- SAP Coaches have submitted completed reports on three coaching processes and successfully completed a developmental Coaching Readiness Interview conducted by two experienced coach practitioners. SAP Coaches must work with three individual clients over two years and must renew this designation annually. In addition to partnering with individual clients, coaches may lead peer consulting or mentoring, facilitate SAP's coaching skills training for managers and leaders, deliver spot coaching (referred to

at SAP as Coaching Moments), and debrief assessments.

- SAP Senior Coaches have accrued five years of experience, completed reports on 10 completed coaching processes and been approved by the GCP Program Office and by a current SAP Senior Coach. In addition to the opportunities available to SAP Coaches, SAP Senior coaches may validate coaching reports for colleagues seeking to "level-up" within GCP.

Beginning in 2016, SAP will launch an initiative to expand ICF Credentialing among GCP coaches.

SAP also offers executives and mid-level leaders the opportunity to partner with external coach practitioners. This relationship is managed by a pair of third-party vendors aligned with ICF standards.

### **One Client at a Time**

SAP measures the effectiveness of coaching by collecting individual impact data. Following each coaching engagement, clients complete a post-coaching impact survey. Through these surveys, clients have reported a host of positive impacts, including behavior change due to coaching; positive changes in emotions, perception and mindset; and an

enhanced capacity for self-reflection and solution-oriented thinking.

One GCP coaching client reported, "My life has completely changed ... professionally and personally as a result of coaching. ... Feedback from colleagues, family and friends confirm it." Another GCP client wrote, "Coaching helped me ... become my own coach moving forward. ... It was transformational."

GCP has also been a powerful driver of professional development for participating internal coach practitioners, as they gain skills and experiences that make them stronger leaders in their primary job functions. One of SAP's HR business partners reported, "I see positive influences on people and the organization from an SAP Junior Coach managing a finance unit. [Since joining GCP] she can deal better with peers, senior leaders and direct reports."

Coaching is closely aligned with SAP's strategic plan. In 2014, the organization hired its first Chief Learning Officer, Jenny Dearborn. As the GCP's executive sponsor, Dearborn is leveraging coaching at SAP to support key strategic goals pertaining to the organization's learning culture and talent management strategy, and to drive employee engagement across a growing global work force.



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Coaching is also a cornerstone of the organization's strategy for recruiting, grooming and retaining millennials, as it feeds their craving for readily available feedback and individualized talent- and leadership-development interventions.

Although GCP's leaders and champions acknowledge that organizational culture change takes time, they also agree that coaching has helped accelerate the process at SAP. As GCP's cadre of practitioners at the SAP Coach level has grown, SAP has been able to expand the availability of "Ready for Coachable Moments," a two-day introduction to coaching and the GROW model for managers and leaders. As a result of this training, SAP is gradually moving away from a conventional approach to performance management and

feedback delivery, characterized by twice-annual performance reviews, and toward a new mindset characterized by regular, recursive development conversations between managers and their direct reports, as well as an increased emphasis on empowering and developing people to create a multiplier effect for the organization.

### Leading the Way

What began as a grassroots initiative at SAP is now embedded in the fabric of the organization, as coaching's influence at SAP is continuing to grow. With Dearborn's support, SAP has allocated funding to provide coaching to 25 percent of employees worldwide. SAP's protocol for employees' development planning has been updated to include "working with an SAP Internal Coach" as a formal option, and coaching is now

an integral part of the organization's onboarding process for leaders following a merger or acquisition. Through "Embedded Coaching Fellowships," SAP Internal Coaches are redeployed to other divisions in the organization to provide full-time, temporary support for specific projects or development goals.

SAP has also made plans to incorporate coaching into one of the organization's flagship corporate social responsibility initiatives. Through SAP's Social Sabbatical Program, top performers within the organization have the opportunity to spend three months volunteering with small businesses in emerging markets. In the near future, SAP Internal Coaches will be aligned with this program to deliver coaching to the volunteers before, during and after their engagements.

With the continued support of leaders in the uppermost echelons of the organization, SAP's GCP is poised to continue driving change—one client at a time—for the next decade and beyond. As an executive from SAP's c-suite wrote, "I am proud to support the program because, as a credentialed coach myself, I can state confidently that this high-quality program enables our leaders and employees to [address] news situations effectively and thus become drivers for change in the digital economy. The best part, however, is that this important pillar of our talent-development strategy was started by a handful of employees with entrepreneurial spirit."

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Formed in 1995, today the International Coach Federation (ICF) is the leading global organization, with more than 23,000\* members, dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high professional standards, providing independent certification, and building a network of credentialed coaches. We exist to support and advance the coaching profession through programs and standards supported by our members and to be an authoritative source on coaching information and research for the public.

*\*Numbers as of October 2015. Numbers are subject to change month to month.*



[Coachfederation.org](http://Coachfederation.org)