



COACHING FOR  
**CARE GIVING**  
AT CLEVELAND CLINIC



INTERNATIONAL COACHING FEDERATION

**PRISM**  
Award

PRISM  
Award

# Cleveland Clinic

**Renowned for its dedication to patient-centered care and innovation, Cleveland Clinic reached its centennial year in 2021. A few years earlier, the Ohio-based academic medical center achieved a different, but equally important milestone in this case for caregiver and leadership development – ten years of building a coaching culture for its 68,728 caregivers all around the world.**

Cleveland Clinic weaves coaching throughout all caregiver experiences, from onboarding and development to performance management and even retirement and beyond.

Built on the foundational belief that all caregivers can benefit from coaching, Cleveland Clinic has trained more than 2,600 managers and leaders on how to adopt a coaching approach to leadership. The beneficial effect of this investment is passing a coaching culture forward not only to Cleveland Clinic physicians, administrators, and caregivers, but also to patients and their families.

“Our coaching is relationship-centered and rooted with our value of empathy where we help others think through their goals and motivations to determine their path forward,” said Chris Nagel, PCC, nominating coach and Senior Director for Organization and Leadership Development of Cleveland Clinic’s Mandel Global Leadership and Learning Institute. “This comes down to our firm belief that everyone has the opportunity to grow and develop for a lifetime.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the institution’s mature coaching culture allowed it to quickly implement agile practices that provide even more support through an on-demand virtual coaching program. In this way, the medical center was able to support physicians and organization leaders alike as they navigated the uncertain times while empowering them to sustain their commitment to the communities they serve.

In recognition of its dedicated approach to coaching, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) named Cleveland Clinic a Celebrated Nominee for the 2020 International Prism Award. ICF’s Prism Award program honors organizations that have achieved the highest standard of excellence in coaching programs that yield discernible and measurable positive impacts, meet rigorous professional standards, achieve key strategic goals, and shape organizational culture (Learn more at [coachingfederation.org/prism-award](https://coachingfederation.org/prism-award)).

## Bringing Coaching to Life

To ensure a full commitment to professional coaching standards, the organization aligned its coaching program and training with ICF’s definition of coaching, [Code of Ethics](#) and [Core Coaching Competencies](#). Cleveland Clinic operates two separate coaching centers for physicians and non-physician organization leaders. The two centers closely collaborate to align coaching activities and training for both audiences. In addition to one-on-one and group

coaching, a peer coaching program brings doctors from different departments together with physicians internally trained as peer coaches to collaboratively set goals, such as improving communication or addressing burnout. The benefits of such a peer-based program extend to coaching participants, but also to the coaches themselves who use their skills even outside of formal coaching relationships.

“The peer coaches are using coaching skills to affect motivational and behavioral change with their patients, with their colleagues and in their personal lives,” said Andrea Sikon, MD, FACP, ACC, and Executive Director of the Cleveland Clinic Center for Excellence in Coaching and Mentoring. “It unlocks that skillset and gets coaching out to the masses.”

### A Decade of Coaching Excellence

At its start in 2009, Cleveland Clinic’s coaching program was primarily performance-based. As the program evolved, the focus shifted to developmental coaching as a way to accelerate and foster strong relationships between leaders through improved communication. The initial success of coaching—which earned buy-in all the way to the top of the organization—led to the adoption of a philosophy throughout the institution—‘Inspire & Coach.’ Today that principle is now one of the organization’s four leader behaviors. Leaders throughout the organization are expected to lead using a coach approach—including during frequent check-in conversations with their teams. Leaders’ effectiveness in this skill set is part of their evaluation criteria.

**“It speaks to a very kind and human approach in how we develop our most important resource, which is our people.”**

*Associate Chief of Clinical Operations for Cleveland Clinic  
Community Care*

A medical director (and Cleveland Clinic’s 2019 Internal Peer Coach of the Year) said a coaching approach enabled him to positively impact all of the lives his peer coachee touched, including his coachee’s patients, on a daily basis.

“I realized I’m touching the lives of the patients that they are touching and impacting,” he said. “That’s essentially why I became a physician leader and now a coach.”

### Coaching for Empathy

In alignment with its “patient-first” mantra, empathy is a core value for Cleveland Clinic’s culture. A survey of peer coach training participants indicated a 20% increase in confidence demonstrating empathy as a result of this training.

The Associate Chief of Clinical Operations for Cleveland Clinic Community Care—a peer coach—explained the connection between empathy and coaching: “It speaks to a very kind and human approach in how we develop our most important resource, which is our people.”

Managers and leaders trained in using coaching techniques during daily interactions also learn how to transform their review processes into real-time coaching conversations. Such discussions reframe the experience from a reactionary, metric-focused review into a reflection-based dialogue designed to inspire and engage, but also to assess empathy. One physician leader described a course geared toward getting the most out of the annual review as an “incredible learning experience.”

## Adopting New Approaches During a Pandemic

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 brought with it a heightened sense of uncertainty for many health care professionals. In response to these challenges, Cleveland Clinic quickly augmented its traditional coaching offerings with an Express Coaching program that was operational within a week. Through the program, leaders navigating the complexities of responding to the novel coronavirus were able to connect with an internal coach for a one-time, 30-minute virtual session. Half of the on-demand requests came from first-time leaders and managers, including one who needed to inform her behind-the-scenes staff that they'd now be working directly with patients in the ICU.

"We were able to gain a quick pulse and validate the need for this type of support based on the themes and urgency of the coaching requests," said Ashley Villani, ACC, Manager of Cleveland Clinic's Mandel Global Leadership and Learning Institute's coaching program and internal coach. "Additionally, we immediately transitioned all of our coaching from in person to virtual for everyone's safety and well-being, which provided a secondary value of increasing access to coaching and its impact across the organization."

Cleveland Clinic also lent support to the coaches themselves with monthly calls for its internal coaching community throughout 2020. These calls focused on ways to use coaching skills to build resilience, such as processing emotions and fostering trust in a virtual work environment. The organization also saw attendance in its ongoing coach development sessions double during the pandemic. Topics included implicit bias in coaching conversations, the importance of non-verbal virtual communication, and working with coaching participants in acute distress.

## ROI: \$84 Million USD Saved in Retention

The economic cost of physician burnout is a challenge throughout the healthcare industry. But Cleveland Clinic's coaching program is having a positive impact on addressing this issue and reaping rewards. To date, more than 160 physicians who worked with a coach indicated the coaching experience was a key factor in their decision to stay with the organization. Cleveland Clinic estimates this alone saved the organization \$84 million in physician retention.

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*Andrea Sikon, MD, FACP, ACC  
Executive Director, Cleveland Clinic Center for Excellence in Coaching and Mentoring*

Through coaching surveys, Cleveland Clinic also calculated the transformational nature of its coaching program. Nearly 90% of caregivers surveyed said working with a coach helped clarify their values and goals for personal growth. Eighty-six percent of caregivers said they felt more prepared to advance in their career. In 2019, a popular customer loyalty metric found Cleveland Clinic scored nearly 30 points higher than a benchmark of excellence for those who would recommend coaching to a friend or colleague. The organization also found that its internal coaches reported similar benefits such as increased fulfillment, engagement and resilience.

## Coaching for 2021 and Beyond

Cleveland Clinic remains dedicated not only to its own coaching culture, but also to educating industry peers on the benefits of creating a coaching program. Senior

coaching leaders have presented at more than 130 academic conferences, and the organization has collaborated with eight national healthcare institutions seeking to launch their own peer coaching programs.

The organization continues to focus on expanding the reach and impact of its coaching culture, including within the institution's international locations.

Additional goals for 2021 include gaining greater insight into coaching's impact by aligning experience data from patients who were attended by coach-trained physicians . A continued support system in fostering a world-class coaching culture has enabled Cleveland Clinic to impact the lives of its caregivers while also enhancing the value for its most important priority—patients. 🍷

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The International Coaching Federation (ICF) is the world's largest organization leading the global advancement of the coaching profession and fostering coaching's role as an integral part of society. Founded in 1995, its 35,000+ members located in more than 140 countries and territories work toward common goals of enhancing awareness of coaching and upholding the integrity of the profession through lifelong learning and upholding the highest ethical standards. Through the work of its six unique family organizations, ICF empowers professional coaches, coaching clients, organizations, communities and the world through coaching. Visit [coachingfederation.org](https://www.coachingfederation.org) to learn more.

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