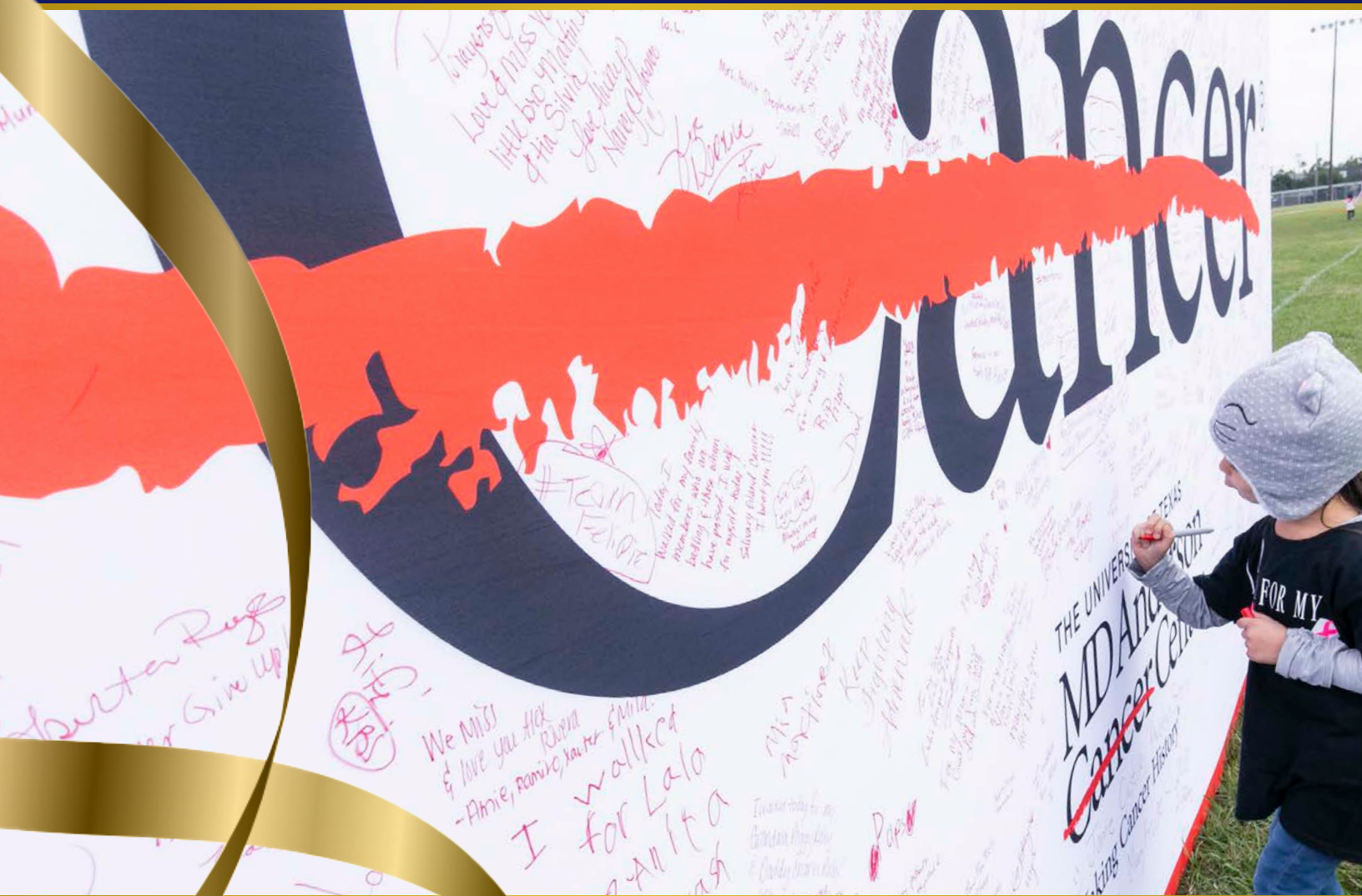


Expanding Leadership Coaching at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

2024 Award Winner: Distinguished Organization



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Every year, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) honors organizations with coaching programs that meet rigorous professional standards. The Coaching Impact Awards celebrate the best of coaching and ICF through various categories that encompass the multifaceted aspects of the profession.

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center (MD Anderson), headquartered in Houston, Texas employs over 25,000 people, including more than 1,900 faculty members, working in 25+ buildings in Houston and Central Texas. That makes MD Anderson one of the largest cancer centers worldwide. Its mission: to eliminate cancer in Texas, the nation, and the world.

MD Anderson founded its Leadership Institute (LI) in 2018, with the aim of creating “relentlessly learning leaders” who can transform their unique challenges into opportunities in service of their organization’s mission. Since then, in cooperation with ICF, the LI has established widespread support for coaching throughout the institution as a strategic driver of change. MD Anderson uses various coaching methodologies specifically for new staff onboarding and ongoing leadership development, but it is available for all employees regardless of job function.

Since 2019, 210 internal coaches have graduated the ICF-accredited coach training program.

MD Anderson’s primary goal in introducing the coaching program was to improve the organization’s capacity to retain new leaders. Specifically, MD Anderson identified a need to focus on leader retention within the first two years of their position start date – a need identified through consultation with organizational leadership, retention statistics, and responses from a 2017 institution-wide employee engagement survey.

A key driver of MD Anderson’s long-term success in its coaching efforts is strategic sustainability. Developing internal coaches through an ICF-accredited program increased access to coaching, strengthened the organizational culture, and invested in the skills of the workforce. Since obtaining ICF level one accreditation to MD

Anderson’s own coaching program, it was redesigned and expanded from five to 10 months of training and is today offered annually to approximately 45 leaders. These leaders must be nominated by a colleague and require approval from their manager and division, after which MD Anderson covers the cost of their 105-hour training. This program has proven to be the cornerstone of a scalable and sustainable model for building a coaching culture within the institution.

Typically, coaches meet with clients approximately once every three to four weeks. MD Anderson advocates coaches to meet more frequently and for a longer duration with new clients to establish rapport and coaching goals. Later, the meeting frequency changes to once a month to once every five or six weeks to help ensure the sustainability of new behaviors.

Since 2018, 70% of MD Anderson employees have received coaching, which is available to everyone within the institution.

Prior to its introduction of coaching, MD Anderson conducted a comprehensive review of existing research and found that coaching is a highly effective strategy to address institutional needs and produce positive, sustainable behavioral changes. These changes create a ripple effect: improved leader behaviors enhance overall effectiveness, performance, productivity, satisfaction, and engagement, which in turn reduce turnover rates.

The results of MD Anderson’s coaching program have lived up to its anticipated impact: An onboarding coaching program to provide development support to leaders during their first year in the position reduced turnover among those leaders by 52% compared to those who did not receive coaching.

Feedback from evaluations revealed that 100% of participants found the onboarding coaching sessions to be valuable for their leadership development, helped them clarify work or leadership goals, initiated insight about progressing towards goal(s), and reported either achieving or being on track to achieve their goals.

MD Anderson has also strategically aligned its individual coaching program available to all employees to its business objective to enhance internal talent development, employee retention, productivity, and skills development. By focusing on growing internal talent, the organization has maintained a leadership promotion rate of over 50% (compared to 36% in 2016), which is indicative of effective succession planning through targeted coaching initiatives.

The introduction of an internal tool called CoachFINDER has democratized access to coaching, empowering employees to seek growth while enabling coaches to gain practical experience in support of their ICF credentials. Since coaching was made more accessible to all employees, talent retention has significantly improved. As an example, within a controlled sample study, MD Anderson leaders participating in coaching experienced a turnover rate of just 12% as compared to 23% for leaders in the control group.

Coaching engagements for employees have demonstrated impact, as evidenced by MD Anderson researchers who received coaching and achieved a mean publication impact (how often a publication is cited), of 2.52 versus 1.84 for their peers. Clinical providers also demonstrated enhanced performance, and launch more clinical trials in comparison to those who have not yet participated in coaching.



The institution's focus on team development has also yielded impressive results, as shown by an 86% favorability in teamwork in 2023, up from 65% in 2017. Employee engagement in leadership has surged from 61% in 2017 to 84% in 2023, and team collaboration has improved from 65% to 86%.

MD Anderson has significantly enhanced both individual performance and organizational effectiveness by addressing essential needs through the development of a systemic coaching framework. This framework encompasses the creation of talent pools, alignment of coaching with strategic business objectives, and the seamless integration of coaching into MD Anderson's talent management systems. Its impact can best be described via four key pillars:

1. Internal Leadership Promotions

Supervisors incorporate coaching into talent discussions, and individuals in the talent review process engage in formal coaching. This strategic approach has resulted in an outstanding achievement in internal promotions, with internal hires making up 55% of new executive appointments – a 53% increase over the last seven years.

2. Retention of New Leaders

All newly appointed or promoted leaders—whether in administrative, clinical, or research roles—are paired with onboarding coaches. This initiative has led to a 52% reduction in new leader turnover.

3. Performance of Coaching Skills

Coaching is a fundamental aspect of every leader's role and is incorporated into their annual performance evaluations. Leaders are assessed on the characteristic of "Capacity Building," which includes the competency of "Coach and Develop." The positive impact of coaching skills is reflected in manager ratings for Capacity Building, which consistently average between 2.50 and 2.55 on a 3.00 scale from 2021 to 2023.

4. Organizational Outcomes

MD Anderson regularly assesses the long-term impacts of coaching participation, comparing coached employees and leaders to matched control samples on key performance indicators such as internal promotions and turnover.

- Coaching participants, compared to matched control samples on key performance indicators, achieved an average post-coaching manager-rated annual performance review score of 2.80, compared to an average of 2.75 for control participants on a 1-3 scale.
- MD Anderson has seen a 41% increase in promotions among coached individuals (31%) compared to their control counterparts (22%).
- MD Anderson has seen a 48% reduction in turnover for coached leaders (12%) versus those in the control group (23%).

Due to the measurable success of coaching at MD Anderson, the organization not only managed to reach leadership retention goals but also expanded its coaching offerings exponentially to target other organizational KPIs. MD Anderson offers many types of coaching, has developed sustainable coaching resources, and cemented a coaching culture throughout the institution, all in close cooperation with ICF.

As MD Anderson continues to expand its team of leaders trained as coaches, the organization remains committed to its goal of providing coaching for all employees. MD Anderson today is fostering a coaching culture that empowers managers and leaders to refine their interpersonal skills and embrace continuous learning – essential elements of thriving in any workplace, but especially one whose mission is to eradicate cancer.



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