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Subject: Coaching News and Events (May 13, 2009)

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## COACHING NEWS

ISSN 1708-9026

May 13, 2009

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Thanks for requesting a subscription to The Coaching News. This newsletter is a publication of Peer Resources (<http://www.peer.ca>), and is distributed at no cost to subscribers every 45-60 days. Back issues of The Coaching News are available at (<http://www.peer.ca/thecoachingnews.html>). All articles are written by Rey Carr unless otherwise indicated. Anyone who would like to contribute an article or information for an upcoming issue of the newsletter can contact Rey Carr at [rcarr@peer.ca](mailto:rcarr@peer.ca)

Peer Resources is a non-profit, member-supported organization dedicated to identifying coaching information from around the world and turning it into knowledge, support, resources of value to coaches, the coaching industry, and the general public.

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### TOPICS:

- Mentoring and Coaching Lessons from a High School Reunion
- Attend a Top Level Coaching Event
- Champions for Coaching
- Five Studies and Resources to Guide Coaching Practice
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### MENTORING & COACHING LESSONS FROM A HIGH SCHOOL REUNION

A new year is a transition marked by engaging in reflection, making resolutions and setting goals. With 2008 characterized by considerable turmoil, turbulence and conflict around the world, a review and possible realignment of personal and professional priorities is inevitable.

However, the advent of a new calendar year is only one of many life transitions. Transitions happen throughout the year, and can often be identified by the degree to which they act as a catalyst for self examination. Transitions typically prompt a review of our capabilities, talents and strengths, a consideration of our weaknesses, an acknowledgement of our mistakes or regrets, or a rekindling of our fears.

One of the most popular and least examined transitions in North America is the high school reunion. It qualifies as a transition because it typically prompts self-examination and brings us to view our current self in contrast to who we were in the past. Sociologist [Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi](#) (1998) described the high school reunion as an "autobiographical occasion which prompts us to examine our own life narratives, the stories we tell ourselves about who we are and how we have come to be that person."

The high school reunion is probably the most common post-high school activity that binds together

virtually all high school graduates in North America. Ralph Keyes (1976), in his book, *Is There Life After High School?* noted that the high school reunion may be "the most tribal experience (a North American) will ever have."

Meeting years later with those who knew us in high school can be experienced as scary, nerve-racking, and challenging. The reunion has the potential to rekindle all the anxieties, fears, worries and struggles that characterized that period in our lives. It can also be experienced as an opportunity to reconnect with a community of people we loved, cherished, and valued. Even those who choose not to attend the reunion may be forced into what Vinitzky-Seroussi called a "biographical confrontation, the unavoidable and often pivotal engagement between a carefully constructed personal identity and the socially prevalent standards of success and accomplishment."

The reunion is a unique opportunity to engage in an autobiographical journey. Unlike a job interview or social occasion where a person might be asked to "tell something about yourself," the reunion propels us to engage in a more complicated life review. It is an opportunity to make sense out of or examine the relationship between our social and personal past and our social and personal present. The reunion drives us to construct a coherent biography of self and engage in narrative story telling. To prepare for a reunion requires, perhaps subconsciously, attention to questions such as 'What have I done with my life? Who have I become? Have I fulfilled my life role? How have I reconciled my inner feelings and outer appearance?'

I had an opportunity to experience this transition close-up: In November of 2008 I attended the 50th reunion of my high school class.

While I was curious about what had become of my classmates over that 50 year span, I was also prompted to think about how I had changed. How had my identity evolved over the years? And what role did my experience of high school play in my subsequent development? Answers to these questions were not readily forthcoming. My memories of high school were a distant blur with only vague recollections. My strongest sense memories were of friends, not the sports we played, not the dances we went to, not the classes we attended, and not the trouble we caused, but what we were to each other. Could this be what my identity was about 50 years ago?

Many of the observations and experiences I had at the reunion had implications for peer assistance, mentoring and coaching. Interactions I had with my classmates both before and after the reunion event helped to validate some of these findings. I want to share them with *Coaching News* subscribers in the hope that they may have value both personally and professionally.

**The Power of Reflection** People attended the reunion for a variety of reasons. Many classmates who had regularly attended previous reunions did so because they enjoyed connecting again with others, and learning about the life progress of their chums. They liked the idea of being accountable to their classmates and being supportive of the progress of their friends. Other classmates appeared eager to share their life stories and gain recognition and affirmation from their peers.

Less frequent reunion attenders were mostly curious about what had happened to others and whether Karma or justice had finally come to roost on a classmate who treated them badly. One classmate, for example, seemed pleased to know that a another classmate that gave her grief in high school was now shorter and more pear-shaped or had a life of underachievement.

For some, attendance at the reunion was more about transcendence. Finding closure or soliciting an apology for long-ago wounds was not uncommon. A few classmates used the reunion to share a hidden hurt or harm or even a joy and thrill from a long ago interaction with the classmate who was perceived as the source. The reaction of the source classmate seemed less important than being able to finally and directly express some long-held feeling. Forgiveness in some cases was also shared.

Several people who attended said that during the reunion they reverted to behaviour that they thought had ended with high school. This was a disturbing revelation for those who experienced this

insight. They had hoped that their life progress had helped them overcome a rerun of behaviour they had outgrown.

Reunion attendance brought to the surface issues that had not been adequately resolved. One person, for example, who had gained considerable recognition and achievement in his professional life found himself reserved and almost uncommunicative when interacting with a girl he had dated in high school; a way of interacting, he said, that was completely uncharacteristic of his current relationships.

One of the surprises for me came from seeing who had attended the current reunion or reunions of the past and comparing that to a printed list of those classmates no one could locate or who had never attended a reunion. Until this fiftieth reunion, the first I had attended, I had been on that list. And all of my closest high school friends were still on that list.

This comparison led me to think about what we had in common. The characteristic that stood out the most was our social orientation and our ability to relate successfully with the ethnic and racial groups in our school. But wouldn't that mean we'd be more likely, not less likely, to attend a reunion?

When I returned home after the reunion I sent an email to one of my friends (JL - not his actual initials) from high school who was not lost to me but was on the reunion "lost classmates" list, and shared my puzzlement about the discrepancy. After he laughed at my question and extracted from me a pledge that I would not provide his contact details to the reunion committee, JL shared his reflection on this situation.

**Living in the Present** JL had considered attending the reunion in the past, but decided against it because being in, thinking about, or reflecting on high school was not part of what gives his life meaning today. JL recalled high school, as I did, with a sense of vague happiness. But the point that he made that struck a chord with me was when he said that he recalled high school as a time when he had a fluid identity. JL saw himself as a chameleon; a person with an ability to almost immediately take on the salient characteristics of the people around him. He was just as at ease in a discussion with the school principal as he was in talking to his peers. In addition, during high school he had no deep interest in his future and only selected study areas or activities based on the expectations of others or a sense of daring or experimentation. He felt as we both did then that he lived in the here and now; cared little about what had gone before, and what was going to come.

I asked JL to what degree that perspective had been carried over into his adult life and work. He said that living in the moment is his primary way of being in the world and that his identity has formed around what provides meaning for him today. He was grateful for the opportunity to have had time for a fluid identity and not being compelled to be a particular person. He also said that his personal, family, and professional life today are filled with people from various cultures, and that he was convinced that "hanging out" in high school with other "chameleons" like himself (and me) helped him to gain his own voice and purposeful direction later in life.

My friend's comments reinforced what concerned me most about attending the reunion. I wasn't interested in spending time talking about my past accomplishments and personal history. I dreaded hearing questions about what I've been doing since high school. And I really didn't want to learn about what my classmates had done with their lives. I cared about them and wanted to be respectful, but I was more interested in who they were now, what they currently yearn for, what keeps them awake at night, what propels them to get out of bed in the morning, and what keeps the light burning inside them. What I wanted to know was more like what Canadian poet and writer Oriah Mountain Dreamer said in the beginning of her poem "The Invitation:"

**It doesn't interest me what you do for a living I want to know what you ache for and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing...**

**The Power of Mentors** Not surprisingly my former high school classmate, JL, had no interest in contacting any of our friends who were on the lost list to find out if they shared a similar

perspective. However, he did let me know that he had only one regret. Much to my astonishment what he mentioned was identical to the single regret I had about my time in high school and one that some other classmates indicated that they shared.

The regret that we had in common was that we wished we had been better friends to each other during our high school days. Being a "better friend" for the most part meant being more understanding, compassionate and accepting, as well as supporting friends to deal with their own life issues. Classmates remarked that conversations with peers in earlier reunions often resulted in revelations about a variety of hidden problems or secret traumas during high school. Classmates revealed that such difficulties often persisted or worsened through adulthood.

Some reunion participants could recall such trauma in their high school life yet seemed to be less agitated by the memory. For the most part they attributed their ability to manage their difficulty by connecting with a peer or adult that cared enough about them at the time to listen closely and help them find a better resolution than they could find on their own.

Several classmates named teachers or peers who took a special interest in them, provided extra time for conversation, acted as an advocate, or led a small extra-curricular group of some kind. Some teachers and peers were named as key figures in helping them transcend life issues. Help was often indirect - - specific discussion of a troubling area may have never occurred - - but the positive attention, as Scales and [Leffert](#) (2004) have also noted, helped classmates feel a sense of worthiness, encouragement and support, all of which contributed to their resilience in dealing with their life issues.

**The Myth of Life Planning** I was grateful for these comments from classmates about the power of mentors and their desire to have been a better friend. A major part of my professional work has been dedicated to making this become a reality for youth through peer assistance and mentoring. Yet up until this 50th reunion I was not really aware that the origin of my pursuit had a foundation in my experience in high school.

-The vague connection between high school and later life was echoed by many of my classmates. One of the surprising outcomes from conversations with classmates were their answers to the question: How would you describe the connection between your high school plans for work or future career and what you then spent most of your life doing? With few exceptions almost all the classmates at the reunion indicated that they never could have predicted or expected that they would have engaged in what turned out to be their life career. While almost all classmates had by now reached the retirement phase from their active work life, it was stunning to learn how few had planned to do what they spent most of their lives doing.

Many classmates talked about their career journey as one of transcending the expectations of others and finding the path that gave them their own voice, resulted in a sense of fulfillment, or gave their life meaning. While they didn't necessarily wish that such transcendence had taken place during high school, they decried the lack of opportunity for such exploration at an earlier age. But they were just as adamant about the value of the journey and what they gained from not following the straight line emphasized in high school.

Their comments reinforced my own experience. During high school I came into contact with a kernel of something, a wisp of a dream that would become a life theme for my work. My future, though, wasn't particularly predicted by the tradition of quality courses and capable teachers; it was foretold in the social relationships and life interactions. Rather than helping me to fully explore my life experience and dreams, the high school curriculum channeled me into a path that matched my test scores, academic achievement, and surface understanding of what I wanted to be in later life. Too many of us have submerged our dreams for ourselves or had them squashed or minimized. The need to provide opportunities for dream exploration is a theme in my latest book (Carr, 2009). My discussions with classmates at the reunion reinforces the contradictions in traditional approaches to life planning and career coaching. Even the career advice of "find something you're good at" is often inadequate as a way to identify a life direction.



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### **Coaching for Managers**

May 27-28, 2009  
Toronto, Ontario  
www.growingcoaches.com  
(416) 481-4802 ext 21  
admin@growingcoaches.com

### **Coach and Horses: Developing a Coaching Presence**

May 28, 2008  
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www.associationforcoaching.com/event/workshops.htm#1\_3  
01304 221300  
kerry@associationforcoaching.com

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additions that you won't learn about from other larger coaching federations:

Carr, R.A. (April, 2009). The two key factors for effective online surveys. *Peer Bulletin 175*. (Retrieved May 10, 2009 from [http://www.peer.ca/Projects/Peer\\_Resources\\_Network.html](http://www.peer.ca/Projects/Peer_Resources_Network.html)). An explanation of how a lack of attention to two key factors of many online-based surveys waste the money of the funding source and the time of those completing the survey. A case study of the International Coach Federation-funded survey, the *2008 Global Coaching Client Study*, is used to illustrate the importance of these factors. The article identifies the significant flaws and sampling errors in this survey that make the resulting data (and other ICF-funded surveys) virtually worthless. Solutions to the problems are presented, including modifying the press releases, newsletter items, and website announcements to include caution and limitation statements regarding generalizing from the data as well as details about the statistical reliability of the data. This article is especially valuable for coaches who intend to conduct online surveys to collect data that will have value and for coaches who may base their practices on data collected from online surveys.

Coutu, D. and Kauffman, C. (January, 2009). What can coaches do for you? *Harvard Business Review*. (Retrieved January 20, 2009 from [hbr.harvardbusiness.org](http://hbr.harvardbusiness.org)). A study of 140 coaches, primarily from the USA and the UK revealed that the coaching field is filled with contradictions over why they are hired, what they do, and how success is measured. The participants did appear to agree that while 10 years ago coaches were hired to fix toxic behaviour, today they are hired to maximize capabilities of high potential performers. Some of the "executive coaches" included in this study claimed that they earn up to \$3,500 an hour, while the median fee appeared to be \$500 an hour. The authors of the study also note that the coaching industry is fraught with conflicts of interest, blurry lines about mental health issues, and weak mechanisms for assessing effectiveness. (Editor's Note: this study makes no distinctions regarding whether the practitioners involved received any coach specific training or were really psychologists and management consultants who now call themselves "executive coaches." This has been a problem with previous articles on coaching appearing in this publication.)

Finkelstein, L. (December 1, 2008). Coaching SaskEnergy to higher performance. *Canadian HR Reporter*. A long-term coaching program was recommended to develop successful leadership behaviours and provide skills that managers could use with their teams. The coaching initiative included assessments, peer-to-peer coaching triangles, and follow-up evaluations. Two-hundred managers at every level participated. The initiative was rated as highly successful because of a number of factors including: coaching goals were tied to organizational strategy and succession planning; extensive participation of managers; coaching triangles were organized into teams and provided support and trusted relationships; workshops focused on follow-up evaluations. As a result of the coaching approach, the company experienced its highest rating as a good place to work by employees. For a list of other corporations that use coaching extensively, go to <http://www.peer.ca/Projects/coachcorps.html> (Peer Resources Network member userid and password required).

Nicholas, J. and Twaddell, K. (2009). *Group executive coaching: 2008 global survey*. Singapore: Air Institute. A 2008 survey completed by 171 respondents online (63 percent female) primarily from North America, Asia and the UK revealed the following about group executive coaching (1) a growing global interest with Europe outpacing the USA almost 3 to 1; (2) typically conducted by more experienced coaches; (3) mostly undertaken on a regular basis as part of leadership development initiatives; (4) typically occurs with intact teams; (5) size matters with most groups in the range of two to six and 7-12 participants; (6) usually takes place over three to six months with only seven percent over one year; (7) building trust and rapport was the top unsolicited critical success factor; and (8) other success factors were related to the coach, the coachees and the coaching process itself. (This study is available to Peer Resources Network members at [www.theairinstitute.com](http://www.theairinstitute.com))

Underhill, B., McAnally, K., and Koriath, J. (2007) *Executive coaching for results, The definitive guide to developing organizational leaders*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler. A comprehensive guide on how to strategically use coaching to maximize development of talent and link the impact of







**JOIN THE PEER RESOURCES NETWORK**

The rapid development of coaching as a practice has generated many associations and organizations competing for participants or members. The Peer Resources Network is the only one that provides accurate, objective, comprehensive, and up-to-date information about coaching, mentoring and peer assistance resources. And the staff is not only easy to contact via toll-free telephone, email or Internet telephone, but they also respond to enquiries typically within one-day.

In addition, members of the Peer Resources Network receive a monthly newsletter, the *Peer Bulletin*, loaded with information, practical tips, announcements, peer program descriptions, funding opportunities, job openings, and research summaries every month. The *Peer Bulletin* contains features not available in The Coaching News, including graphics, links, discounts, relevant articles, free research papers, and contact details. A sample of the Peer Bulletin is available at <http://www.peer.ca/Bulletin161.html>

Members can also receive at no cost some of the latest books or videos on about coaching in exchange for writing a review of that resource. In many cases the retail price of the book alone is equivalent to the one-year membership fee. Some of the current books available to members include:

- [Coaching Plain & Simple: Solution-focused Brief Coaching Essentials](#) by Peter Szabó and Daniel Meier (109 pages, softcover)
- [Coaching Skills: A Handbook \(Second Edition\)](#) by Jenny Rogers (291 pages, softcover)
- [Executive Coaching: Building and Managing Your Professional Practice](#) by Lewis R. Stern
- [Presence-Based Coaching: Cultivating Self-Generative Leaders through Mind, Body, and Heart](#) by Peer Resources Network member Doug Silsbee
- [A Manager's Guide to Coaching: Simple and Effective Ways to Get the Best Out of Your Employees](#) by Brian Emerson and Anne Loehr
- [The Philosophy and Practice of Coaching: Insights and Issues for a New Era](#) edited by David B. Drake, Diane Brennan and Kim Gortz
- [Coaching in Organizations: Best Coaching Practices from The Ken Blanchard Companies](#) by Madeleine Homan and Linda J. Miller
- [How to Become a Coach: What You'll Want to Know about Training Programs, Certification and the Business of Coaching](#) by Sue Bond
- [The Complete Guide to Coaching at Work](#) by Perry Zeus and Suzanne Skiffington
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- [Executive Coaching for Results: The Definitive Guide to Developing Organizational Leaders](#) by Brian Underhill, Kimcee McAnaly, and John Koriath
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- [Therapist as Life Coach: An Introduction for Counselors and Other Helping Professionals \(Revised and Expanded\)](#) by Patrick Williams and Deborah C. Davis
- [Positive Psychology Coaching: Putting the Science of Happiness to Work for Your Clients](#) by Robert Biswas-Diener and Ben Dean
- [The Truth About the Business of Coaching](#) by Lawrence Mortenson
- [Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life \(Second Edition\)](#) by Laura Whitworth, Karen Kimsey-House, Henry Kimsey-House, and Phillip Sandahl



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