

Is virtual coaching the future?

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This year, family life, school and study life, as well as our working lives have not just been temporarily disrupted by the global pandemic, but shaped differently for the conceivable future. There are going to be routines and habits; strategies and plans; ideas and attitudes that are never going back to 'normal'.



According to the [2019 Executive Coaching Survey conducted by Sherpa Coaching](#) before the pandemic; an estimated one third of all coaching activity already happened online. Like everything in life, virtual coaching has its pro's and con's. Virtual coaches have been able to develop global practices, connecting with the clients they can work well with across geographical, time and currency zones. In the virtual space, clients have broader access to a diversity of coaches and a better range of affordable and convenient coaching options. Offering more choice and more flexibility, virtual coaching has enhanced what both coaches and clients value most highly – more opportunities to develop the most effective relationship, which is at the heart of coaching success.

In 2020, out of necessity, coaching around the world became virtual coaching. This adaptation ensured continuity for those already in coaching relationships, and also opened doors for those who needed to start them up during an incredibly challenging time. For clients who absolutely prefer face-to-face connection, this has been a compromise. For coaches who had never considered going online, this has been a learning journey, thrilling for some, and daunting for others.

Virtual coaching demands a few critical enhanced skills from the coach. Reading the non-verbal cues of just one person in the digital space is harder than face-to-face. This challenge is amplified if you are doing group or team coaching in the virtual environment.

SACAP (South African College of Applied Psychology) Coach Educator, Dr Svea van Hoorn of Solutions Focused Futures, says “While this is no different in principle from face-to-face coaching, the virtual environment might require better small signal literacy from the coach in order to respond as effectively to facial expressions and gestures on-screen. For some, developing this finer tuning might have been a challenge over these past months of enforced virtual coaching, but it will be

an asset to them in the future whether they maintain and develop a virtual coaching component of their practice, or return to face-to-face services.”

A recent study by the [International Coaching Federation \(ICF\), Covid-19 and the Coaching Industry](#) reveals that coach practitioners across the world are ‘cautiously optimistic’ that the industry will strengthen over the next six months, while a majority agree that the impacts of the pandemic on aspects such as fees and focus areas will be consequential.

At a recent SACAP **#VirtualCoaching Twitter Talk** SA coaches shared insights into what they have gained and lost in the virtual coaching space. Many noted the advantages of increased flexibility, wider reach and more varied opportunities in the virtual coaching space. On the con side, some of the negatives were nuanced such as clients reporting that they missed out on their reflection time during their journeys to and from a coaching appointment. Other drawbacks were obvious – who isn’t feeling screen fatigue? As we have all come to realise, the virtual meeting space is easily disrupted by tech and connectivity hassles; as well as the competing demands of family life going on around us. The formal, controllable, face-to-face coaching session offers a peaceful, private sanctity which is so important to coaching; and that’s not always easy or possible to re-create in every virtual coaching engagement. What also came up on the SACAP **#VirtualCoaching** twitter feed was the dilemma of some clients wanting discounted rates for a screen-time session, even though coaches do have to work harder to read signals in the virtual coaching space. Fee flexibility is expected to be an ongoing issue as the economic impacts of the pandemic unfold.

Everyone has had to adapt. Some coaches have found new and exciting paths because of this. Others are holding out for the return to face-to-face interactions. It is likely that the significant boost to virtual coaching is here to stay, with many coaches taking a hybrid outlook that enables them to cherry pick the benefits of both. SACAP has translated Covid-19 learnings like this as they have shaped their 2021 coaching education programmes according to best practice blended learning models. Their fully accredited Coach Practitioner Programme, Advanced Coach Practitioner Programme and Postgraduate Diploma in Coaching all blend in-person on campus components with evening classes held via their Online Live platform. The flexibility of online learning, with its opportunities for self-directed learning, are combined with carefully targeted in-person education so that working professionals can develop quality coaching skills and benefit from meaningful face-to-face interaction with their educators.

If you are interested in becoming a coach, please visit: www.sacap.edu.za/coaching/overview/

All three of the [coaching programmes](#) offered by SACAP are accredited by the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and approved by COMENSA. The ICF, which was founded in the USA in 1995, is the world’s largest coaching organisation connecting practitioners and educators in a professional community that today, spans more than 100 countries. SACAP’s two-year Postgraduate Diploma in Coaching (PGDC) is a comprehensive NQF 8 level qualification, equivalent to an Honours degree, while their Coach Practitioner Programme is five months and the Advanced Coach Practitioner Programme is six months long. These learning programmes respectively provide foundational and in-depth theory as well as extensive practical skills.

SACAP also offers a [Coaching in the Workplace](#) online short course, with international accreditation. Participants completing SACAP’s short online Coaching in the Workplace gain 30 hours of International Coaching Federation (ICF) Accredited Coach Specific Training (ACSTH) hours that can count towards the minimum number of coach training hours needed to become accredited by the ICF as an Associate Certified Coach.

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