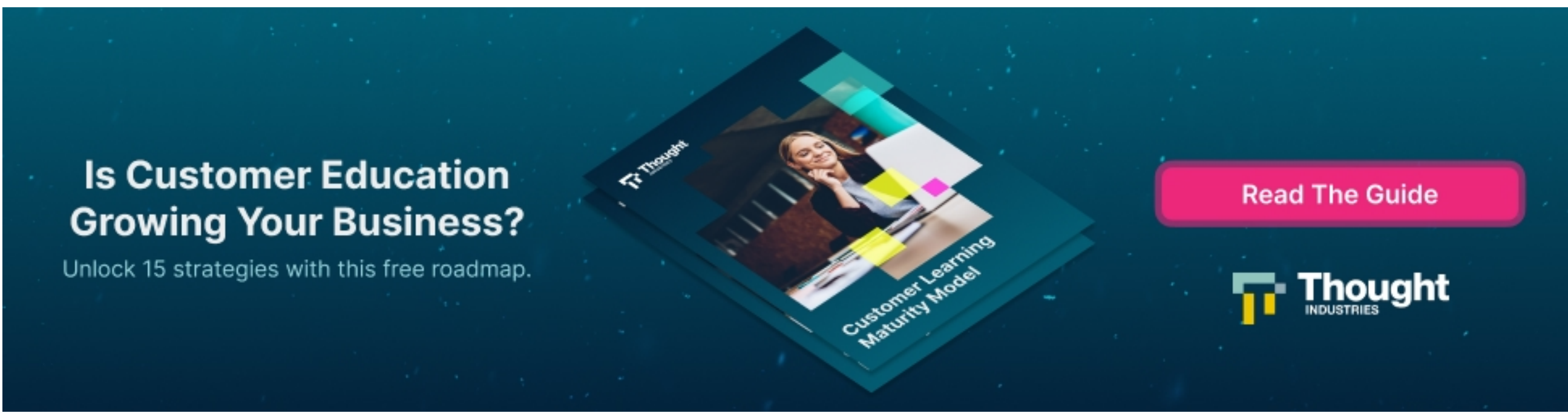




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Magazine Articles

Productivity Coach’s Corner: The Hidden Variable in Coaching Success

Coachees need to show up ready to “go there.”

By **Dr. Jason Womack** - April 17, 2026



Early in my career, I showed up for coaching (and mentoring) sessions like I used to show up to my counseling (and therapy) sessions.

I waited for my coach to do the work. Often, I would end a session smiling, thinking to myself, “They didn’t ask me the questions they should have asked...that’s on them to get me to talk about my stuff”

In 20-plus years as an executive, leadership, and team coach, I’ve partnered with organizations that train internal coaches, hire external ones, build coaching cultures, and weave coaching into leadership development. The investment makes sense: Coaching accelerates growth, sharpens decision-making, and builds self-awareness that makes leaders more effective.

But here is what most organizations overlook: A successful coaching program is only as good as the people being coached say it is.

As an International Coaching Federation (ICF) Certified Coach and Board Certified Coach, I have sat across from hundreds of professionals in coaching conversations. The pattern is consistent: When a coachee shows up prepared, present, and willing to do the work between sessions, the coaching produces results. When they show up passively (waiting to be fixed, hoping for answers, or treating the session as a calendar obligation), even the best coaching stalls.

The problem isn’t how well-trained the coach is. It’s that too often the coachee has not been trained how to “go there.”

Mind the Gap

Does your organization have a coaching program? A culture of coaching? If so, reflect on this: “How much do we help our people increase their coachability?” In my experience, we provide next to nothing. We train the supply side and ignore the demand side.

Coaching is fundamentally different from both mentoring and training. A mentor shares experience. A trainer transfers knowledge. A coach holds the space and the process. The coachee must “go there” regarding the content, the commitment, and the follow-through. The ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process. That word, “partnering,” is doing a lot of work. The coachee is not a passenger. They are a co-pilot.

What Great Coachees Do

One day, over a decade ago, I left a conversation with a professional and realized: I didn’t “go there.” I kept waiting for them to get me to talk about what I KNEW I needed to talk about. I decided I’m not doing that...ever again.

Since then, every opportunity I’ve had to sit with someone in a place to help me, I’ve “gone there.”

And I’m better because of it.

The professionals who get the most from coaching share two disciplines. Not personality traits; practices that are learnable, teachable, and observable.

1. **They prepare before the session.** Great coachees do not walk in cold. They arrive having reflected on what happened since the last conversation, what they tried, and what they want to explore. A coachee who says, “I’ve been thinking about what we discussed, and here is where I got stuck,” is operating at a different level than one who says, “I’m not sure what I want to talk about today.”
2. **They stay in the discomfort. Longer.** Coaching works in the space between where they are and where they want to be. Great coachees resist the urge to deflect or retreat to safe ground when a question lands close to something real. The coachees who grow fastest are not the ones with the best answers. They are the ones willing to stay with the hardest questions.

A Challenge for L&D Leaders

If you are involved in building or supporting coaching programs, ask yourself the question I ask everyone I work with: “What kind of coachee preparation are you providing?”

Consider a quarterly re-orientation to the coaching your organization supports. Teach people what coaching is and is not. Help them understand the coach is NOT responsible for giving answers; people might turn to training or mentoring for that. Provide a simple framework: Reflect before arrival, choose something specific to explore, and commit to one action before the next session.

This takes one session to teach and can double the return on every coaching hour invested.

The Reciprocal Truth

I have written that mentorship is a two-way street. Coaching works the same way. The coach brings skill, presence, and commitment to the process. The coachee brings honesty, preparation, and a willingness to act.

When both sides show up fully, coaching becomes more than a development program. It becomes a practice of thinking clearly, deciding deliberately, and leading effectively.

Coachees: Your organization may have given you a coach. That is an investment in your potential. How you prepare, engage, and follow through is your investment in return.

Show up ready. The coaching will support you in “going there.”

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Dr. Jason “JW” Womack is a strategist and executive coach who advises leadership teams operating in complex, high-consequence environments. He works inside organizations to strengthen the conditions that determine performance. How leaders interpret signals. How standards translate into behavior. How decisions align across functions and time horizons. Drawing from psychology, sociology, and systems theory, Womack focuses on the structural dynamics that shape coherence, accountability, and sustained execution. He is the author of multiple books on leadership and performance, available at: <https://www.amazon.com/Jason-W-Womack/e/B005N3257A>

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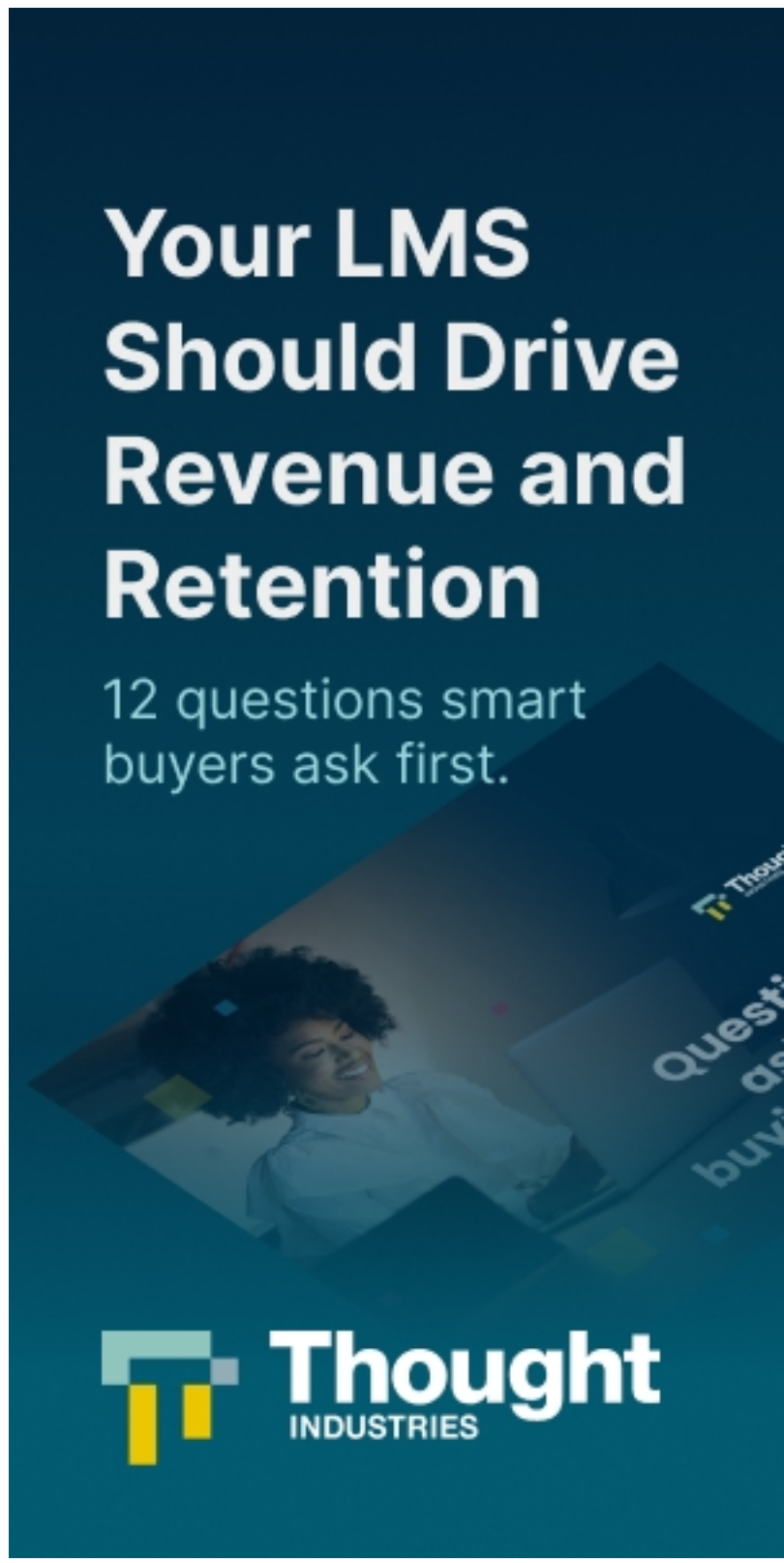
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