

Coaching High Achievers

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This investigation used semistructured interviews with coaches (n = 7) and high achievers (n = 14) from business and sports to identify common characteristics of high achievers that are important to take into account when coaching them, coaching needs of high achievers, and key implications for the practice of coaching high achievers. Content analysis grouped the data into themes. Findings suggest that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to coaching may be inappropriate and a number of factors need to be taken into account when coaching high achievers. Of fundamental importance is the need to establish a coaching relationship built on trust and mutual respect. The impact of the coaching is determined by a number of factors, including the coach being challenging, flexible, and adding value quickly.

The last decade or so has witnessed a growing literature on the psychology of excellence with the focus being mainly on performance excellence in business (e.g., Collins, 2001; Collins & Porras, 2000; Gilson, Pratt, Roberts, & Weymes, 2000) and sports (e.g., Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996; Jackson & Csikzentimahalyi, 1999) domains. Indeed, several authors have recently drawn close links between sports and business excellence (Jones, 2002; Loehr & Schwartz, 2001; Murphy, 1996; Weinberg & McDermott, 2002). One particularly common practice across the two domains is that of coaching people to higher levels of performance (Jones, 2002). Giglio, Diamante, and Urban (1998) argued that the emphasis in business coaching has tended to be on providing support for underachievers. This has resulted in relatively little focus on coaching people who are already performing to very high levels (i.e., high achievers). This investigation addresses this knowledge gap and focuses specifically on the character of high achiev-

ers, their coaching needs, and associated best coaching practices.

The literature on business coaching is characterized by a “one-size-fits-all” assumption and has generally failed to clarify the differences in coaching style and approach required for “high-achieving” versus “lesser-achieving” individuals. However, recent research on high achievers suggests that they are, indeed, different from lesser achievers and that they are likely to have specific coaching needs. Kaplan’s (1990) study of senior executives offered interesting insight into the character of high achievers and how they are likely to differ from lesser achievers. Kaplan identified a character type in high achievers that he called “expansiveness,” defined as “strong ambition to occupy a bigger than average place in life through high achievement” (1990; p. 308). Expansive executives are characterized by: 1) a willingness to push themselves and others hard to achieve results; 2) an exceptional drive for mastery; 3) a strong orientation toward task at the expense of feelings; 4) confidence in their own ability; 5) hunger for the rewards associated with high achievement; and 6) defensiveness with regard to criticism and failure.

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Maccoby's (1995) work on experts provides a further interesting perspective on high achievers that both reinforces and extends Kaplan's findings. Maccoby concluded that high achievers, in the form of experts, are motivated by opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, master challenges, and gain recognition. The dominant value for experts is mastery, with their self-esteem being a function of status and professional respect from their peers and superiors. According to Maccoby, experts have a strong need for autonomy and, at their best, stand for high standards of service and scientifically proven knowledge. As well as identifying some of the key elements of being an expert, Maccoby also drew out some of their less savory attributes that may be evident. At their worst, he stated, experts can be inflexible and rules-driven. They often want control over their functions and resist the empowerment of others. Finally, they tend to relate well only to peers and superiors or younger high achievers who share their values.

Hall (1999) concluded that high achievers can also find themselves in quite difficult circumstances. Specifically, in the case of high-flying managers, he stated that they can suffer from four major career disadvantages: 1) their rapid progression through the organization meant that they had insufficient time to develop a network of relationships to support their learning; 2) their developmental acceleration had resulted in alienation of people who were potential sources of sabotage; 3) because they had progressed so rapidly, they had not had the opportunity to experience failure and career setbacks, leading to a relative lack of career resilience; and 4) as a result of their history of continual success, they had received relatively little developmental feedback. All in all, this work in the business field suggests that there is something about the attributes of high achievers and the situations they can find themselves in that may re-

quire specific, and perhaps specialized, coaching content and approaches.

Within sports, there is an abundance of scientific literature that demonstrates key differences between successful and less successful performers. These differences include: self-confidence (Mahoney, Gabriel, & Perkins, 1987); the way they deal with pressure (e.g., Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996; Jones & Swain, 1995); and their use of psychological skills such as imagery (Mahoney & Avenier, 1977; Orlick & Partington, 1988), self-talk (Klinger, Bart, & Glass, 1981; Orlick & Partington, 1988), and goal setting (Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996).

The relevant literature has also highlighted the pivotal role of the coach in enhancing the performance of high-achieving athletes. For example, recent investigations by Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, and Guinan (2002) and Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, and Chung (2002) of U.S. Olympic athletes and their coaches identified a number of coach-athlete relationship factors that are important in influencing performance: the athlete's trust in the wisdom and experience of the coach; the coach's ability to keep things simple, to deal with crisis situations, and to make decisive but fair decisions; the coach's commitment to helping the athlete succeed, along with realistic performance expectations and a clear performance plan; the athlete's confidence that the coach was well aware of his or her needs; the coach's ability to establish trust with the athlete; and the coach's ability to stay composed under pressure. The importance of the relationship between high achievers and their coaches has also been widely recognized in the business field (e.g., Thach & Heinselman, 1999), where matching the coach's expertise with the executive's needs and establishing a strong personal chemistry in the coach-executive relationship is crucial in building a trusting and open relationship (Corporate Leadership Council, 2001).

In summary, the literature reviewed here highlights two important points: 1) high achievers are different from lesser achievers and are therefore likely to have specific coaching needs; and 2) the nature of the relationship between high achievers and their coaches is of particular importance. The interview-based study reported here sets out to explore these factors further in a sample of high achievers and coaches from both sports and business. The specific aims of the study were to identify: 1) common characteristics of high achievers that are important to take into account when coaching them; 2) coaching needs of high achievers; and 3) key implications for the practice of coaching high achievers.

Method

Participants

Consistent with qualitative methodologies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990), purposive sampling was used to select the study participants. Twenty-one high achievers (HA) and coaches of high achievers (CHA) from business and sports were informed of the nature of the study and invited to participate in it. The participants comprised 14 HAs and seven CHAs whose ages ranged from 30 to 50 years (HA mean age = 36.93 years, standard deviation [SD] = 4.67; CHA mean age = 37.81 years, SD = 5.70).

The major criterion for selection of the sport HAs ($n = 6$; 4 males, 2 females) was that participants had competed successfully in national and international competitions and had been performing at an elite level for at least 5 consecutive years. The sports HAs included performers from the sports of swimming, rowing, rugby union, and track and field athletics. Selection of the business HAs ($n = 8$; 5 males, 3 females) was based on participants having been fast-tracked to executive management positions and having held those positions, or better, for a minimum of 5 consecutive years. The business HAs included executives from information technology, finance, retail, distribution, and leisure companies.

Selection of CHAs (4 males, 3 females) was on the basis of having provided one-to-one coaching support for business and/or sports HAs. Five of the seven CHAs had coached both sports and business HAs; the remaining two had coached business HAs only.

Interviews

All participants were interviewed using a semistructured technique. Participants were briefed as to the purpose of the research and provided with an overview of the interview questions 2 to 3 days before the interview to allow them to prepare. Participants were informed that all data would be reported anonymously. All interviews were tape-recorded and conducted by the same individual and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Ten of the 14 HA interviews were conducted over the telephone and four were conducted in person. Of the CHA interviews, four were conducted over the telephone and three were conducted in person. Weinberg, Butt, and Knight (2001) have previously showed no differences in findings resulting from these different forms of interviewing. The questions, which formed the interview, were developed to address the following areas: 1) What are some of the common characteristics of high achievers that are important to consider when coaching them? 2) What are the coaching needs of high achievers? 3) What are the key implications for the practice of coaching high achievers?

During the interviews, the participants were asked to comment on each area relevant to them either as a coach or as an achiever. Appropriate probes were used depending on the responses of the individual.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using content analysis. Specifically, quotes were grouped into themes if they logically fitted together under each interview area for both CHAs and HAs. The protocol used in analyzing and reducing the data was as follows: 1) all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed; 2) two researchers read the transcripts and familiarized themselves with the content; 3) data themes were then identified by each of the researchers and HA and

CHA responses were collapsed together when appropriate. Consensus was then achieved by the researchers as a result of subsequent discussions; and 4) after establishing these themes, the participants were given the opportunity to comment on the themes identified and their view given as to whether they felt the themes were representative of their responses. When there was disagreement, discussions were held with the participant and the researchers until consensus was gained.

Results

In presenting the results, the themes that emerged are presented under each of the key areas of exploration. The results from sports and business performers and coaches have been combined because the purpose of this study was to identify the coaching needs of high achievers per se and not to explore differences between the two domains. The themes are presented separately with representative quotes throughout to illustrate the specific meanings and basis on which the themes were derived.

Common Characterizes of High Achievers That Are Important to Take Into Account When Coaching Them

A number of characteristics emerged as important to take into account when coaching high achievers.

Self-Focused

HAs are particularly interested in the opportunities coaching can provide to further their own performance and development:

“I was naturally demanding and self-centered. HAs do it for themselves, not for anyone else. They work out the best people to use to make performance better” (HA).

“I was demanding and selfish. My own performance was the only thing that mattered” (HA).

Goal-Driven

A further characteristic of HAs is that they set themselves highly challenging goals that drive them to high levels of achievement:

“They stretch themselves incredibly. Self-imposed demands—this is what drives them—some influence from others, but there is a more predominant self-drive” CHA.

“I was extremely goal-driven—they ruled my life” (HA).

Totally Committed

Having a total commitment to achieving high-level performance emerged as another important characteristic of HAs:

“They are totally committed and driven to be the best” (CHA).

“I wanted success so badly—that’s why others haven’t achieved so much. Other people have not been willing to make the sacrifice” (HA).

“They’re extremely committed to achieving their goals” (CHA).

Demanding

A strong theme to emerge from the interviews was that HAs are very demanding, having high expectations of themselves and their coaches:

“They have high expectations of themselves and other people. They will challenge ideas and will not accept everything you say. Non-HAs are less likely to do that” (CHA).

“It’s great fun. They’re mentally stimulating, challenging and hard work. You need to be completely on top form” (CHA).

“I was very demanding of my coach” (HA).

Continually Striving for Improvement

It was clear from the interviews that HAs are constantly in search of new and better ways of enhancing their performance:

“HAs want to try different things, and are often not satisfied with the way they’re doing things” (CHA).

“I wanted my coach to open my eyes about possibilities” (HA).

“I always look to improve, addressing weaknesses. I’m continually looking for more and more and more” (HA).

A Sponge for Information

Given the drive for continual improvement, it is not surprising that HAs are constantly seeking new information that will aid their progress:

“They are interested in getting that extra bit of information that might be able to get a better performance” (CHA).

“They are sponges for information for new and better ways of doing things” (CHA).

“I was very coachable—a sponge for information” (HA).

Confident

HAs tend to exhibit confidence in their own ability, which may, in some HAs, come across as arrogance:

“They tend to be very self-assured in appearance. They look confident and have a great belief in their ability” (CHA).

“They can be arrogant and have a great belief in their own ability” (CHA).

“HAs have a robust self-esteem” (CHA).

(Sometimes) Isolated and Lonely

Experiencing some feelings of isolation and loneliness on occasions was also identified as being an important factor to take into account when coaching HAs:

“It gets lonelier, less people around you that can give genuine advice. . .you get more suspicious about feedback” (HA).

“I’ve had to work things out for myself more as I’m more isolated. . .my boss is remote and he doesn’t have a coach” (HA).

“It can be lonely being a senior manager” (CHA).

Coaching Needs of High Achievers

Several important needs emerged in the context of coaching HAs.

Ultimate Trust in the Coaching Relationship

This theme relates to the process of building the coaching relationship. As a result of the isolation and loneliness sometimes experienced by HAs, some may have learned to be suspicious of the people with whom they work/perform. Therefore, HAs value relationships in which they can have complete trust:

“Confidentiality, and the trust that goes with it, is extremely important and that’s where external coaches are so important” (HA).

“I need a close relationship of ultimate trust” (HA).

A Coach With Credibility

This theme emphasized the need for the HA to have confidence in and to respect the ability of the coach:

“They are only open-minded when they have built respect for someone” (CHA).

“HAs often want to know about you, a little bit of background information, about your track record, delving into your resources” (CHA).

“They respect those who are good at what they do. You need to earn their respect by 1) showing them you know what you are talking about, and 2) showing them you can help them achieve more” (CHA).

“You need belief in your coach. . .He will sometimes make you do things that feel a bit alien, so you need the confidence” (HA).

A Coach Confident in His or Her Own Ability

As reported in the previous section, HAs tend to exhibit confidence in their own ability; however, the interviews indicated that confidence on the part of the coach is also important:

“He was confident in himself and I liked that” (HA).

“You need to sustain your own confidence, and work hard on it, so that you can get the best out of them” (CHA).

A ‘Lack of Ego’ in the Coach

The egos of HAs emerged as an interesting theme, highlighting that there is only room for one ego in the coaching relationship and that is the high achiever’s!:

“Some of them have huge egos. . .so there is an element of having to massage their egos” (CHA).

“Effective coaches are not there for themselves” (HA).

“A lack of ego—it’s not about being right or wrong—is crucial” (HA).

“Self-interest is definitely a no-no” (HA).

Feedback

HAs will often ask their coach for detailed, and often instant, feedback on a wide range of factors that they perceive to impact on their performance:

“They are not content with their own view, and are not afraid of feedback. They are more open than non-HAs to you watching them, warts and all” (CHA).

“They really want feedback and are clear what they want from you. HAs are looking for and want change. Non-HAs can be happy with the way they are and can be a bit scared of feedback” (CHA).

Confidence-Boosting

HAs generally need constant positive reinforcement of their skills, knowledge,

and competencies. Such reinforcement comes from a well-respected and trusted coach who they can believe is a valuable source of confidence:

“You need to feel they believe in you more than yourself” (HA).

“I needed direction and confirmation that I was doing ok” (HA).

“I needed a lot of ego-boosting at certain times, despite my self-belief. It got shaky at times and my coach gave me some reassurance” (HA).

To Feel Continuously at the Cutting Edge

It is important for HAs to feel that they are up to date with new theories, new ways of doing things, and so forth:

“They want to be at the cutting edge, whatever they do. . .to be on top of their performance” (CHA).

“Very rarely am I in my comfort zone with HAs. . .they want to go beyond the cutting edge. . .you have to help them find the one thing that takes them beyond the cutting edge” (CHA).

Rapid Results

HAs need to see some tangible outcomes arising from the valuable time and effort they are devoting to the coaching process:

“They need results right now. . .I am often presented with issues that they need solutions to quickly” (CHA).

“I have a low boredom threshold. . .and need to get results quickly” (HA).

Key Implications for the Practice of Coaching High Achiever

The following factors emerged as being key predictors of the success of the coaching process itself:

Do Not Try to Be His or Her Friend

HAs generally want professional coaching relationships based on mutual respect:

“He was a good listener, but not a close buddy. A distance between coach and performer is important” (HA).

“There was a strong emotional bond, but I did not want to be friends with him” (HA).

Find Out How You Can Add Value—Quickly!

HAs’ time is very precious so that they become very frustrated when they perceive their time is not being put to the best use:

“They tend to know all the obvious stuff and wasting their time is not on. They want to be taken to a new place—quickly!” (CHA).

“You have to make sure you’re adding value at all times, and not just going in for a chat” (CHA).

“They want to be coached, but the organizational context is often such that they struggle with legitimising the time for coaching. . .the challenge is their time and focus” (CHA).

Find the Right Pace

Finding the right pace for development and moving forward when required is particularly important when coaching HAs:

“You have to be nimble, know when to dwell on something and when to move on quickly” (CHA).

“I don’t respect coaches who can’t recognize when you’re ready to move on” (HA).

Be Flexible

This theme highlights the often-changing demands on HAs and the need for flexibility in approach and content on the part of the coach:

“Their agenda can change dramatically and you need to be ready for it” (CHA).

“You need to be flexible and think on the hoof. . .you might go in (to a coaching session) with some ideas but need to be flexible and creative when in there” (CHA).

“Being flexible and responsive to my needs was so important” (HA).

Be Challenging

HAs want coaches who will continually challenge and stretch them:

“They want someone with ability to challenge their ideas, stretch them” (CHA).

“You need to be able to adjust the volume of support and challenge” (CHA).

“I need someone to look at my behaviors and to provoke my thoughts” (HA).

“I want someone to test the alternatives with. Someone to challenge me, someone to discuss difficult issues with” (HA).

Discussion

This investigation used a semistructured interview with coaches and high achievers from business and sports to identify: 1) common characteristics of high achievers that are important to take into account when coaching them; 2) coaching needs of high achievers; and 3) key implications for the practice of coaching high achievers. The findings suggest that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to coaching may not be appropriate and that there are several factors that need to be taken into account when coaching high achievers as opposed to lesser achievers. To facilitate the process of drawing these out in an ordered fashion, a summary of key themes and implications for coaching high achievers follows.

The findings pertinent to the characteristics of typical high achievers provide an interesting picture. Their intense *self-focus* on personal performance and development is closely aligned with self-imposed, extremely stretching, *goal-driven* behavior to which they are *totally committed*. High

achievers are thus very *demanding* not only of themselves, but also of their coach in helping them achieve their goals. In their quest to *continually strive for improvement*, they are constantly in search of new and better ways of doing things so that it is not surprising that they are a *sponge for information*. These findings support those of Kaplan (1990) in terms of a willingness to push self and others hard to achieve.

The findings have a number of implications for coaches of high achievers, as shown in Table 1. Perhaps most importantly, the coach needs to ensure that the core content of the coaching satisfies the high achiever's personal performance and development needs. As part of this process, the high achiever's goals should be the clear and central focus of the coaching, which requires the coach to have a thorough knowledge of the goal-setting process. It is also beneficial for the coach to have a good understanding of the world of high achievement and what it takes to become a high achiever to demonstrate empathy for the total commitment required. The demanding nature of high achievers means that the coach should expect to be challenged and not expect everything he or she says to be accepted without question. Furthermore, the high achiever's quest for continual improvement means that the coach should strive to help them identify the different possibilities and options available. Their thirst for new information can be satisfied by providing them with a steady supply of relevant information (e.g., latest thinking) that will stimulate their thinking around continual improvement.

Two other themes emerged in the context of the characteristics of high achievers that appear to be more about the outcome of being high achievers as opposed to the process of high achievement. First, they tend to be *confident* in their own ability, which means that the coach will need to be similarly self-assured in the presence of high achievers if a good working relation-

ship is to be established. Second, high achievers can *sometimes feel isolated and lonely*. This is not surprising in the light of Hall's (1999) predictions regarding the disadvantages that high-flying managers in business can experience as a result of their often rapid rise through organizational hierarchies. In sports, high achievers can experience similar isolation and loneliness because they are in the minority and can be a "target" for their competitors. The implication for the coach is to establish the nature of the coaching relationship in terms of the frequency and method of contact outside formal coaching sessions, because the high achiever will benefit from the knowledge and comfort that a trusted advisor is accessible.

A number of coaching needs of high achievers emerged from the study. A theme revolved around the nature of the coaching relationship itself, emphasizing the *ultimate trust* required on the part of the high achiever. This mirrors the findings of Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, and Guinan (2002) and Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, and Chung (2002) who found trust to be a key factor in the coach-athlete relationship. Among other things, one particularly important implication is for the coach to continually emphasize the confidential nature of the content and process of the relationship. Three themes concerning aspects of the coach him- or herself emerged from the findings. Specifically, high achievers need *a coach with credibility* and who has *confidence in his or her own ability*, but a *lack of ego in the coach* is equally important. The implication for the coach is that he or she does not necessarily have to have achieved what the high achiever has achieved, but does have to have been successful in his or her own sphere of life and, at the very least, have a detailed and informed knowledge of and empathy for the high achiever's situation and circumstances. The coach also needs to portray genuine confidence in his or her own abil-

Table 1
Summary of Implications for Coaches of High Achievers

Characteristics of HAs	Implications for CHAs
Self-focused	Ensure that the HA's personal performance and development is the primary focus of the coaching
Goal-driven	Ensure that the HA's goals are a clear and central focus of the coaching process Have a thorough knowledge of the process of setting and achieving goals
Totally committed	Understand the world of high achievement, and what it takes to become a high achiever
Demanding	Expect to be challenged
Continually striving for improvement	Help them to identify the different possibilities and options for improvement
A sponge for information	Provide them with a steady supply of relevant information (e.g. latest thinking etc.) that will stimulate their thinking around continual improvement
Confident	Be self-assured in the presence of HAs
(Sometimes) isolated and lonely	Establish the nature of the coaching relationship in terms of the frequency and method of contact outside formal coaching sessions
<i>Needs of HAs</i>	<i>Implications for CHAs</i>
Ultimate trust in the coaching relationship	Continually emphasize the confidential nature of the coaching relationship
A coach with credibility	The coach does not necessarily have to have achieved what the HA has achieved, but a detailed and informed knowledge of and empathy for the HA's situation is essential
A coach confident in own ability	Have genuine confidence in your own ability
A lack of ego in the coach	Explore own motives for coaching HAs
Feedback	Be ready to provide (developmental) feedback at all times
Confidence-boosting	Remember that the coach is a valuable source of positive reinforcement. Provide positive (motivational) feedback as appropriate
To feel continually at the cutting edge	Keep up-to-date with relevant theories, literature, methods, etc.
Rapid results	Have a continual focus on helping the HA to identify specific actions that will deliver short-term, as well as longer-term, results
<i>Coaching HAs</i>	<i>Implications for CHAs</i>
Do not try to be his/her friend	Work hard at maintaining a professional relationship
Find out how you can add value - quickly	Establish a 'contract' as soon as possible
Find the right pace	Recognize when to dwell on something and when to move on quickly
Be flexible	Expect the coaching agenda to change and respond accordingly
Be challenging	Ensure that the coach provides a level of stretch that challenges the HA's current thoughts and behaviors

ity, but not with so much confidence that they have an ego to protect. In particular, the coach should constantly explore his or her own motives for coaching high achievers.

Two themes related to important components of the coaching process. First, high achievers have a hunger for *feedback* and will often ask the coach for detailed, and

often instant, feedback across a wide range of areas. Therefore, the coach needs to be ready to provide developmental feedback at all times. However, it is worth noting that Kaplan's (1990) findings regarding HAS' potential defensiveness toward perceived criticism means that the feedback may need to be framed with particular care. Second, as a result of the trusting nature of the coaching relationship, the coach is an important source of *confidence-boosting* in the form of positive reinforcement of their skills, knowledge, and competencies. The coach should be aware of this at all times and provide positive, motivational feedback as appropriate.

Two additional themes in the coaching needs category related to the outcomes of the coaching process. High achievers have a need to *feel continuously at the cutting edge* so that it is imperative that the coach keep up to date with the most recent theories, literature, methods, and so forth. Also, because high achievers are often under severe time pressure, they want to see *rapid results* as a consequence of the valuable time and effort they are devoting to the coaching process. Thus, the coach needs to have a continual focus on helping the high achiever to identify specific actions that will deliver short-term as well as longer-term goals.

The final area addressed key implications for the practice of coaching high achievers. Five themes emerged as being particularly important to bear in mind. "*Do not try to be his or her friend*" reflects the need of high achievers to have a professional relationship at all times. As a result of the time pressure associated with being a high achiever, the coach may not have much time to make an impact and therefore needs to *find out how he or she can add value quickly*. Establishing a verbal agreement with the high achiever in terms of expectations and timeframes can be helpful in this context. *Finding the right pace* with respect to the progress of the coaching is

also important. The coach should be able to recognize when to dwell on a specific topic or issue and when to move on quickly. *Being flexible* is a further prerequisite for coaching high achievers successfully; the coach should expect the coaching agenda to change and be able to respond accordingly. Finally, the high achiever will want and expect the coach to be *challenging*, providing a level of stretch that takes them beyond their current thoughts and behaviors.

In summary, the findings from this investigation suggest that there are some important differences between high and lesser achievers that should be taken into account as part of the coaching process. It is important to emphasize, however, that this does not mean that there are some coaching practices that are only relevant to high achievers; indeed, many, if not all, of the factors are common across coaching in general. Rather, the important message is that there are some practices that are particularly important to consider when coaching high achievers. Furthermore, this investigation aimed, among other things, to identify common characteristics of high achievers from business and sports. Overall, although not specifically evident in the quotes presented in the "Results" section, the authors were struck by the commonality of themes across business and sports performers and coaches (see Jones, 2002). This is not to imply that there is a stereotypical high achiever against which all coaching should be benchmarked. Indeed, coaching is an individual-specific practice in terms of both content and approach. However, there are some key characteristics that coaches need to be aware of before entering a coaching relationship with a high achiever. Finally, the experience of coaching high performers is probably best summed up by a quote from one of the coaches in the sample: "coaching high achievers is challenging, draining, and enjoyable, all at the same time."

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