

# **Using Attachment Theory in Coaching Leaders: The Search for a Coherent Narrative**

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## **Abstract**

Attachment theory is a well-established body of work in developmental psychology. In this article, I provide an overview of the key elements of the theory and demonstrate how it can be used in coaching leaders. In connecting the ‘working models’ they use as adults with the cognitive and interpersonal patterns they developed as children, attachment theory provides an important lens on development and change in leaders. Drawing from Bowlby’s (1988) work and current neuroscience research, five strategies are offered on how to use attachment theory in coaching leaders. In particular, there is an emphasis on working with client stories and helping them develop greater narrative coherence in how they talk about and live their lives.

## **Introduction**

[It is] what Freud called the ‘repetition compulsion,’ the magnetic summons of an old wound in our lives that has so much energy, such a familiar script, and such a predictable outcome attached to it that we feel obliged to relive it or pass it on to our children. (Hollis, 2005, p. 81)

Coaches routinely encounter vestiges of long-held patterns that continue to echo across their client’s stories and lives. In tracking these patterns, coaches are looking for the ways in which clients are living the same ‘story’ over and over again; e.g., remaining stuck in the same role or response in the belief that—this time—it will get them the connection and confidence they have been seeking. It is not about the past, though, as much as about appreciating the long arc of change in adults. A key role for coaches is to provide a safe space in which clients can be witnessed for more of who they are, experience themselves at their best, and learn new ways of seeing themselves and relating to others. I have found my study of attachment theory very helpful in deepening my narrative approaches to coaching and developing leaders.

Attachment theory is based on the study of the patterns of connection and communication between parents (or other primary caregivers) and infants and how they shape the latter’s

cognitive, emotional and social development (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1973, 1969/1982). Infants' developing brains instinctively drive them to seek physical closeness and resonant communication with the people closest to them, usually beginning with the mother. The adaptive patterns that are established early on based on the responses an infant experiences shape the unique ways in which his/her parasympathetic nervous system moderates the once dominant sympathetic nervous systems' drive to reach out and connect (Badenoch, 2008).

Attachment theory helps us understand the cognitive schemas, somatic reactions, behavioural preferences and narrative patterns that children carry into adulthood as a result, in part, of what happens in response to these primal drives. In doing so, the case is made for a correlation between patterns of response in our early relationships, patterns of narration in our development of identity, and patterns of engagement (or not) in our relations with others. In particular, attachment patterns reflect people's tendencies, particularly under stress or perceived threat, to move closer or farther away from others. Karen Horney's (1945) work on the origins of neurosis in children supports this thesis in seeing attachment-related challenges as emerging from frustrations in trying to fulfill the needs for both safety and self-expression. In time, young children's *ad hoc* strategies often become cognitive schemas, character traits, and behavioral patterns. As a result, coaching adults involves helping them resolve any of their subsequent 'divided wishes' (Horney, 1945) so they can invest wholeheartedly and authentically in their life and work.

This paper takes a look at how coaches can use attachment theory in their work. It provides a brief overview of attachment theory, the patterns of attachment, the benefits of secure attachment, and some strategies for coaching leaders from an attachment frame. In particular, we will look at the role of narrative coherence in both development and in coaching leaders. The narrative and behavioral patterns that appear in a leader's life and work are quite often vestiges of patterns of attachment from childhood. As leadership is increasingly seen as relational, contextual, and interdependent in nature, attachment theory provides an important frame for recognizing patterns in their ways of engaging with others. Without venturing too far into a more purely psychotherapeutic space, qualified coaches can certainly use their understanding of attachment theory to guide their interventions with clients.

A narrative approach works particularly well along these lines as a result of the strong connections between schemas, stories and behaviors. Clients' stories can be explored as indicators of their attachment preferences and their subsequent needs for development. For example, a coach may find that beneath a client's stories of his great accomplishments lies a fixation on past events to avoid present relational demands and a great fear of relying on others for help that is hindering the leader's further advancement. The goal for coaches is to help leaders develop a secure sense of attachment that would yield more coherent narratives about the past, present and future and enable leaders to be more resilient, flexible and empathic. These are critical attributes in leaders, particularly in these challenging times.

### **What is Attachment Theory?**

Siegel (1999) defines attachment as “an inborn system in the brain that evolves [largely in the first two years of a child's life] in ways that influence and organize motivational, emotional, and memory processes with respect to significant caregiving figures” (p. 67). Being able to freely express their emotional state and have others perceive and appropriately respond is vitally important for the development of an infant's brain and the growth in their ability to regulate their internal states, attune and adapt to various environments, and communicate about and influence their external states (Siegel, 1999). Attachment theory speaks to what happens for infants—emotionally, cognitively and socially—as a result of their early experiences in seeking to reach out for and connect with significant others (particularly the mother). In this process, the development of a felt and stable sense of a *safe haven* and a *secure base* are critical for the development of a secure attachment in children (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1988).

### **Safe haven**

The sense of a *safe haven* results from the proximity of and access to a trusted caregiver when the child feels anxious or senses danger. One of the key ways in which young children develop a sense of a safe haven, form attachment bonds, and increase their range of tolerable distance, is through what is called, ‘contingent communication.’ This mutual sharing of nonverbal signals and mutual influence through their interactions creates a sense of emotional attunement and mental state resonance and forms the basis for healthy, secure attachment

(Siegel, 1999). Over time, this attuned communication enables the child to “develop the regulatory circuits in the brain that give the individual a source of resilience as he or she grows . . . and the capacity for engagement with others in empathetic relationships” (Siegel, 2007, p. 27). When feeling threatened, people engage in adaptive mental and physical responses they believe are necessary to manage internal and external demands and feel safe. A reinforcing loop is formed in which the degree to which there is a sense of a reliable safe haven affects the perceptions of ‘demands’ and ‘threats and one’s abilities to meet one’s needs’ which in turn reinforces one’s current sense of safety.

### **Secure base**

The presence of a sufficient safe haven provides a child with a sense of a *secure base* from which to increasingly and confidently explore the world—and to which he or she can return as needed as part of ever-widening circles. This is important for development because, as researchers have noted, the more threatened an individual feels, “the more 'primitive' (or regressed) becomes the style of thinking and behaving” (Perry, Pollard, Blakley, Baker & Vigilante, 1995, p. 274). A secure base reassures the child’s need for “familiarity-preserving, stress-reducing behaviors [and emboldens the child’s need for] exploratory and information-seeking behaviors” (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 16). The strength that comes from having a reliable and resonant secure base enables children to feel both internally integrated and interpersonally connected to others as they move out into the world (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

### **Working models**

As children grow, they begin to rely less on external figures for safety and more on the repeated experiences they have encoded in their implicit memory as ‘working models’ (Bowlby, 1988), the mental models of attachment they will increasingly carry within themselves. The early somatic experiences become cognitive structures reinforced through the narrative identities that form in our first relationships and shape the way we see and process our world. These models are especially activated (and made visible) when we need to provide or receive support. If there is not an internalized sense of secure attachment, a person’s engrained response may lead them to seek or avoid proximity (or some chaotic state in between) as part of a long-ago set of strategies for coping with incomplete attachment.

These schemas are especially apparent under stress because of their central role in affect regulation (Cozolino, 2006) and may result in the use of secondary strategies (hyperactivation, deactivation, or both) if the primary one (proximity seeking) is not effective. For example, they may cling to the parent—and subsequently other authority figures later in life—rather than face the separation distress necessary for the development of a healthy ego. Much of what we see as defensive or resistant behavior is better viewed as a suboptimal attempt to get legitimate needs met. A reliance on secondary defensive strategies is required when a person is unable to build the secure foundation necessary to be clearly mindful of internal and external events (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Coaching provides an opportunity for adults to surface, examine and adjust their often taken-for-granted models in order to increase their capacity for intimacy, authenticity, maturity and mindful choice.

### **Patterns of Attachment**

From the initial experiments (see Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) involving the observations of reunions of children with their mother, four primary patterns of attachment were identified: *secure* (about 70% in the original studies), and three insecure patterns—*avoidant*, *anxious*, and *disorganized* (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Research by Mary Main indicated that about 85% of the time there was a correlation between these four categories of the children's reunion behavior and the attachment styles of their mothers (see Hesse, 1999). These findings make sense in the light of our growing understanding from the neurosciences about the vital role of approach patterns and resonance between parent and child in shaping the structure of developing brains (Siegel, 1999).

The four patterns have held up well across decades of subsequent research and are described briefly below.

- Children who were seen as *secure* generally had mothers who rated as free and autonomous, emotionally available, and perceptive of and responsive to the child's needs, states and signals. A securely attached child feels safe, understood and confident that most of the time the parent is a reliable source of nurture, protection and meeting their needs (Siegel, 1999).
- Children who were seen as *avoidant* in their attachment generally had caregivers who

were dismissing; emotionally unavailable, imperceptive and/or unresponsive; and perhaps even rejecting of attempts at proximity. As a result, these children tended to avoid dependence by pursuing self-reliance, avoid discomfort with closeness and therefore preserve distance, and avoid their needs by using deactivating strategies (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

- Children who were seen as *anxious* generally had caregivers who were preoccupied; inconsistently available, perceptive, and responsive; enmeshed and entangled; and frequently imposing their state. As a result, these children tended to manage their uncertainty about independence by pursuing closeness and protection, and manage their anxiety about the availability of and their intrinsic value to significant others by using hyperactivating strategies (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).
- Children who were seen as *disorganized* generally had caregivers who were frightening and frightened, disorienting, and alarming. As a result, these children tended to simultaneously approach the caregiver for security and avoid her for safety, resulting in a conflicted, and even dissociated, state (Cozolino, 2006; Siegel 2007). Fortunately, this is the least common attachment pattern.

It can be useful in coaching to use these four attachment patterns as a way to understand leaders' cognitive and interpersonal responses—both in the session and at home/work. While many leaders have softened the rougher edges of an insecure attachment, their habitual but less-functional responses often have roots in the compensatory strategies they developed as children. For example in my work teaching leaders how to coach their peers and staff, people with avoidant attachment issues often have difficulty asking emotive questions in coaching others out of a fear that they will be unable to adequately handle the imagined responses. They are already primed for the need to deactivate and, as a result, will often unconsciously steer their coaching conversations away from difficult or sensitive topics that may threaten their equilibrium. In these situations, I work to expand the emotional range in our conversations so as to increase their ability to feel secure in conversations with others. Coaches can help these leaders reframe their internal dialogue, attune with their somatic states, and learn new skills in interacting with others in order to move toward a greater sense of 'earned security.'

## **Attachment in Adulthood**

Although attachment processes are most evident in children given their underdeveloped defenses, adults continue to employ their initial schemas in varying degrees based on their sense of internalized security. In part this is because these adopted patterns often impact the affective styles, narrative themes, and patterns of engagement in interpersonal relationships (Siegel, 2007). However, rather than seeing these connections in linear, causal terms, coaches can work dynamically with clients' stories as a tableau of elements of their past and future at play in their present.

In doing so, coaches can draw out stories that are illustrative of (or reactivate) a leader's dominant attachment strategies so as to provide opportunities for the development of new strategies that are more conducive to their development and well-being. For example, I worked with a marketing executive who realized that he kept finding himself in roles where he would be drawn into conflicts between a senior leader and his team. His growing resentment at taking on this role led to a realization that it also served as a means to manage his own anxieties— as this behavior had done for him in his own family of origin. As part of my own work as his coach, I recognized that it was a pattern that was familiar in my own life.

### **Benefits of a Secure Attachment**

Attachment theory suggests that the more effective people are in regulating, communicating and leveraging their inner state to remain connected and agentic in their outer world, the more able they are to be a good leader. With a secure sense of attachment and coherence in their life stories— whether it is continuous from childhood or earned in adulthood—leaders no longer have to hold on to old patterns in an outdated and disproportionate effort to survive. Instead, they can become much more conscious, flexible and powerful in their internal reactions and external responses. When a secure sense of attachment, a person learns that “distance and autonomy are completely compatible with closeness and reliance on others. There is no tension between autonomy and relatedness” (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 14). As a result, they are more able to handle to the full range of the emotional demands of leadership.

In reviewing the literature, securely attached adults tend to have the following characteristics:

- Are sustained by positive yet mature beliefs about themselves and the world (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007);
- Have a greater cognitive capacity for and experience with receiving empathy, and therefore are more perceptive of, sensitive to, and able to respond to the needs of others (Begley, 2007);
- Organize and utilize their cognitive and emotional memory functioning to a high degree (Cozolino, 2002);
- Have a high tolerance for ambiguity and tend to be less dogmatic in their thinking and communicating as a result of their intellectual openness (Begley, 2007);
- Can constructively (re)appraise situations so as to maintain an optimistic sense of self-efficacy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007);
- Are mindful and mature enough to repair ruptures as needed in their rapport and communication with others (Siegel, 2007);
- Engage in new, growth-promoting, self-expanding experiences and address existential concerns such as aging, love and freedom rather than having to be perpetually on guard (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Are not these many of the qualities we coach for in leaders? We can both assess and shift the level of attachment security in leaders through working with the coherence of their stories as a lever for change.

### **Narrative Coherence**

The stories that leaders tell in coaching are often windows into the larger narrative patterns in their life and a rich source of material for their development. Attachment studies reveal that one of the best predictors of a child's attachment to a parent is the degree to which the parents' life stories have 'narrative coherence' (Siegel, 2007), e.g., a meaningful integration of difficult events, a traceable plot line, and minimal 'unfinished business.' I would also offer that the level of coherence in their stories—about the past, present and future—often reflects leaders' own attachment experience and the way in which they lead and interact with others at work. Secure and autonomous leaders have life stories that allow them to “live fully in the present, unimpaired by troubles from the past, denial in the present or attachment-related worries about the future” (Siegel, 1999, p. 91).

As such, coaches can explore with leaders the gaps in narration, relations between narrative elements, and signals for development in their stories to help them to shift the connections between their attachment-shaped schemas and actions in support of a more coherent narrative, secure attachment and effective leadership. For example, a coach can work with avoidant-attached leaders to fill in the gaps in their stories with the more difficult emotive information they typically dismiss, normalize or rationalize. A coach can work with anxious-attached leaders to notice how they tend to be preoccupied with and enmeshed in their stories as a way to support them to build greater trust in themselves and others. Leaders' stories often reflect the unresolved developmental dynamics they have brought forward through their life—and will continue to do so until they are integrated into their psyches in new ways.

Therefore, a core practice in narrative-based coaching is to increase clients' reflective capacity so they can become more aware of these narrative traces and the ways in which they shape their ways of seeing the world and acting in it. As Fonagy and Target have suggested (cited in Siegel, 1999), this reflective function is more than mere introspection; it directly influences their whole self-organizational process. I will often ask clients to tell the same story at several points in our work together as an informal means for assessing improvement in their ability to bring coherence to their experience and accessing leverage points for their development. For example, in coaching a client on his work/life balance I asked him at several key points in our work together about what it is like for him when he comes home from work—particularly in light of stories he had shared about his own experience as a child. As Wallin (in Wyatt & Yalom, 2008) observed, the attachment categories provide a way to understand the states of mind in which clients get stuck sometimes and the early relationships from which they may have arisen. Narrative coherence provides a way of understanding these patterns as seen in the stories that clients tell about their lives.

### **Coaching Leaders from an Attachment Frame**

“If my team just [took more initiative], then I would not have to be so [demanding].” While each of us can fill in the blanks with plenty of our own client stories, the beauty of such lines from clients is that they provide an opportunity to help them deconstruct their experiences to get at their underlying assumptions, attachment orientations and accountability. This is not always easy to do, particularly around elements of their identity and behavior that are deeply

engrained and well defended. Like many coaches, I used to try to push past this resistance from participants and clients so we could make more ‘progress.’ However, in recent years, I have begun to question the value of ‘pushing’, the existence of ‘resistance,’ and the meaning of ‘progress.’ I have come to increasingly agree with Hillman (1983) that the task “is not so much breaking down defenses and overcoming resistances as it is one of rediscovering the necessity of these maneuvers which are the psyche's very responses to its weakness” (p. 99).

In doing so, I am increasingly interested in exploring each client’s unique ‘maneuvers, the edges and texture of their defenses, and the shadows on the other side that are essential for the next steps in their development. Defenses begin as an intrinsic and healthy part of development early in life; they are there to protect the differentiating and adaptive ego. As Gagan (1998) observed, they “work on our behalf, altering reality by creatively rearranging conflicts into more manageable situations. The resulting distortions give us time to acclimate to life’s contingencies until the anxiety of the threatening situation can be borne” (p. 140). However, when these once essential defenses are used repetitively and inflexibly in the face of threats that are perceived as unmanageable they can become a barrier to development, resilience and flexibility. Current neuroscience research seems to indicate that the over-reliance on these early defense structures tends to interfere with the development of more complex neural networks (Dougherty & West, 2007).

As a result, I have moved to a ‘pulling’ strategy in trusting that clients will find their own path, reframed ‘resistance’ as the discovery of a self-definitional boundary to be explored, and withdrawn my attachments to ‘progress’ to make room for greater awareness. Rather than waging Sisyphean battles with our clients, coaches are better off engaging them about what they are seeking to attain or accomplish—albeit often in nonconscious ways—through their stories and their actions. In doing so, coaches will be able to more fully appreciate the underlying aims behind their behaviors and see them as adaptations that once had survival value at an egoic level and still have nonegoic value at deeper levels. The ability to recognize clients’ attachment patterns in their stories—and help them to do the same—is the first step in helping them develop a more coherent narrative and attain greater *earned security*.

A ‘push’ coaching strategy with the leader who is seen as demanding might focus on setting behavioral goals to be less so with his team. A ‘pull’ strategy would, instead, start from the story of what happens for him when others do to take sufficient initiative (from within his view of the world), what fears this triggers now (and has triggered before), the nature of what he is defending against (usually an anticipated internal feeling state and /or a perceived external threat), and what roles and responses he instinctively takes as a result. In addition to addressing specific interpersonal dynamics, coaches can also help leaders learn how to deal with high levels of environmental and emotional stimuli and still retain high degrees of integrity and functioning. In order to support this “broaden-and-build cycle” of attachment security (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) coaches can assist clients to surface and evaluate their defensive strategies so as to develop alternatives more in line with their current goals.

One way that coaches can do this is by looking for points of breakdown in the coherence—of their clients’ stories—those places where the old story doesn't work anymore or is incomplete, but that serve as openings for breakthroughs in a client’s life. For example, I worked with a client who complained about the lack of cooperation and consultation from his executive team. In doing so, I helped him to notice the places in his stories where he turned away offers for help—and rationalized doing so—such that he continued to stand alone. While this was a familiar place for him to be, it was no longer satisfying for him personally or sustainable for him professionally. These breakdowns can be seen and used as openings to the developmental edges in clients, those in-between spaces (Drake, 2008, in press) where growth most often occurs.

Many of the issues leaders bring to coaching are “embedded in their character armor, shaped during development as an adaptation against real or imagined danger. . . . This armor is largely preverbal and organizes during the first years of life” (Cozolino, 2002, p. 60). This is exacerbated by the fact that many organizational leaders have been acculturated to ‘get over it’ in the face of difficulty or grief, such that elements of their authentic personalities and true potential are pushed aside or diminished. As a result, they devote precious life energy in remaining vigilant to protect those aspects of themselves around which they feel less secure. However, the defenses they develop to avoid some experiences prevent them in the end from seeing reality clearly and restrict their range of affect and action (Fulton & Siegel, 2005).

Coaching can re-create experiences that provide leaders with opportunities to candidly observe their attachment-related patterns, explore their origins, and seek out new, more secure, options.

### **Five narrative strategies**

In *A Secured Base*, Bowlby (1988) proposed a model of change based on “helping a client understand his or her accumulated, and often forgotten or misunderstood, attachment experiences, identify and revise insecure working models by transforming them into more secure models, and learn about ways to achieve both comfortable intimacy and flexible autonomy” (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, pp. 406). He discussed five therapeutic tasks that contribute to the revision of insecure working models and the achievement of positive therapeutic outcomes. I have revised and extended this list to provide a guide for coaches who want to understand and facilitate the development of their clients using attachment and narrative frames.

1. *Provide clients with a sense that the coaching sessions are like a safe haven and a secure base from which they can explore their defensive strategies (both beliefs and behaviors).* This provides leaders with a ‘holding container,’ a ‘safe place,’ where they can relax their *narrative grip* (Boscolo & Betrando, 1992), often for the first time, and adopt less defended positions relative to their developmental, interpersonal, and leadership demands. It is important for most clients to experience the primal comfort of right hemisphere to right hemisphere resonance—as they did to varying degrees as infants—as the basis for the felt sense of a safe haven and a secure base for further work (Badenoch, 2008; Siegel, 1999). The goal is to move them to a ‘sweet spot’ where there is sufficient juice to activate their awareness and engage them but sufficient safety so they can stay present to their defenses and make new choices. For example, I spent two months coaching Jim<sup>1</sup>, a leader in local government, to observe his health habits before he was ready to deal with his highly avoidant relational patterns and what this was costing him personally and professionally.
2. *Use the rapport that is gained to help leaders take a good look at how they currently relate to others, how they currently narrate these relationships, and the biases*

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<sup>1</sup> The name and some details have been changed to preserve anonymity while providing sufficient integrity and utility as a case.

*inherent in their constructions.* This aspect of the work is based on the need for an increased testing and facing of ‘reality’ as the basis for change. This is important because as Dougherty and West (2007) point out, “our woundedness, our individuality, and our gifts are directly related. Within our character structure is the essence of what is needed for transformation and individuation” (p. 2). Once Jim and I had developed sufficient trust—such that the triggers related to his attachment avoidance patterns relaxed—I helped him examine the impact of his relational style on his significant relationships and the hidden assumptions behind his tendency to overwork (as one of his compensatory strategies). In doing so, he began to soften his defenses and broaden his stories to include more of his compassionate nature.

3. *Use your coaching sessions as a laboratory for the study of clients’ attachment-related behaviors, inevitably including the transference and projection of established working models onto you and the coaching relationship, and the opportunity to experiment with new, more secure, relational patterns.* If we think of coaches as ‘mirrors’ for clients, it is essential that we do our own development work on a regular basis so we remain compassionate, clean, and clear in our reflections. Doing so will give clients the experience of being understood and the positive feelings associated with secure relationships. As time goes on, bridges can be made between what goes on in the coaching relationship and what can happen in a leader’s other important relationships—in the past, present or future (Wallin in Wyatt & Yalom, 2008). For Jim, it was about making agreements with me to have heart to heart conversations with key members of his extended family as we had done in our sessions together.
4. *Help leaders to reflect on how their working models and their subsequent interpersonal patterns—particularly around the roles and positions they tend to take relative to significant others—are rooted in childhood experiences with primary attachment figures.* In doing so, it may be useful then to consider Cozolino’s (2004) advice on three key messages for clients, “this defense was once very important, but now is hurting you, and it may no longer be necessary” (p. 145). The aim is to help clients recognize that although their working models may once have been adaptive, or at least seemed better than the alternatives when interacting with nonoptimal attachment figures, they are no longer sufficient in meeting the demands of leadership or even of their own drive for wholeness and growth. For Jim, it was important to

finally acknowledge the lifelong patterns with his own father and to connect the profoundly dismissing treatment he experienced throughout his life with the ways he showed up as a husband, parent and boss that were both distant and over-involved. It was not about either blame or a direct causality, but rather to help him give voice to the preverbal roots for the patterns of relating and behaving he sought to change.

5. *Position yourself as a coach as a "good enough" and available caregiver to help leaders experience other attachment orientations and behaviors.* One way to do so is to “react to clients' attitudes toward proximity in ways that collide with their demands and disconfirm their expectations and maladaptive patterns of relatedness. This collision provides an opportunity for corrective emotional experiences that seem to be beneficial for both alliance strength and client functioning” (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 423). You can look at coaching as a relationship in which coaches, as surrogate attachment figures, make room for experiences the patient’s original attachment figures couldn’t make room for. The research indicates that the relationships that yield the most resiliency are those that are maximally inclusive of the depth and breadth of clients’ feelings, desires, views, behaviors, etc. (see Wallin in Wyatt & Yalom, 2008). In this way, coaching is a venue for liberation such that leaders can learn to breathe into greater integrity, authenticity and resiliency. For Jim, it was the eventual decision to take early retirement and relocate to be near his grown children, but to leave with a smile on his face for the first time in years.

### **Conclusion**

According to recent research, approximately 55% of children are securely attached, a decrease of about 10% in the last 10 years (cited in Badenoch, 2008, p. 63). Given that these children are the workers and leaders of tomorrow, it is imperative that we take notice of what this figure means for our organizations and our societies. As the global community wrestles with a disruptive economic crisis and ecological turning point, the time is now to think again about how to develop the leaders we will need for a brave new future. Given the emotional, technological and social complexities of the challenges we face, it is more important than ever to develop leader who have a secure attachment. As such, coaching is a gift for leaders as a sanctuary in the midst of organizational and civic cultures “with fewer and fewer psychic homes, places and moments, persons and situations where one can take off the armor, put

down the defenses” (Paris, 2007, p. 121). It is my hope that more coaches will take up attachment theory as a resource for assessing and helping leaders develop greater attachment security, bring more coherence to their narratives, and find their path to more authentic and mature leadership as a result.

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