

Looking Forward

A blue telescope on a pedestal overlooking a cityscape at sunset. The telescope is the central focus, pointing towards the right. The background is a blurred cityscape with warm, golden light from the setting or rising sun.

A report on WABC's 2016 survey on qualifications, standards and services

Since its inception in 1997, the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC) has successfully raised the bar on standards, credentialing and client satisfaction to become the leading professional body for the business coaching industry worldwide. Both our enormous achievements and growing global footprint have set the stage for WABC to now choose its new strategic priorities for the next five years.

We decided to prepare for this effort by inviting all our key stakeholders to participate in our global survey in January 2016. We were thrilled to receive a wave of responses notable not just for their volume, but for the

quality of their insights, suggestions and feedback. We'll review some of the survey's more interesting and relevant observations in this summary report.

On business coaching

First, though, we'd like to take a moment to answer a perennial question: what exactly *is* business coaching? Let's start with the things it's not. Business coaching is not life coaching (a practice that focuses only on a person) and it is not business consulting (a practice that focuses only on a business and its objectives). Instead, business

Business coaches specialize in coaching people as contributors in a collective enterprise

coaches specialize in coaching people as contributors in a collective enterprise, helping their clients achieve business results by breaking free of habits that

hold them back and by identifying strengths that will enable them to succeed. Through conversation and skilled observation, business coaches help their clients see their own behavior in an objective light, building their capacities to act effectively, ethically and without blinders.

About our respondents

A solid majority of respondents to our survey (about 80%) are either active individual members (full or affiliate) and WABC Accredited® program providers, or former members of WABC — meaning that the results strongly reflect our membership and our member’s opinions — while a substantial minority are non-member subscribers.

By geography, 39% of respondents are from the United States, 11% from Canada, 9% from Hong Kong, 7% from both Italy and the UK, 4% from Germany, with other

respondents hailing from 23 other countries around the world.

We’re a well-qualified group, too. 43% of respondents have WABC’s Registered Corporate Coach designation and 25% have WABC’s Certified Business Coach designation, while only 11% say they have no formal coaching-specific qualifications at all.

Views on qualifications & experience

One of the most interesting areas of the survey focused on the importance of business coaching qualifications to clients. Almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that their clients or the organizations they work for prefer that they hold a formal coaching-specific qualification.

At a more granular level, in fact, it seems that respondents are *underestimating* the strength of client demand for qualifications.

Coaching-specific qualifications that organizations prefer their coaches to have, according to...



Particular qualifications and experiences considered when choosing a coach, according to...



Measured across a range of specific designations and degrees, actual client preferences are shown again and again to be significantly higher than respondents' own perceptions of such demand; less than 5% of organizations using business coaches say they have no requirement for qualifications at all.

Something that marks out business coaching from all other forms of coaching is the importance placed on having prior experience in business and in organizations. Both coaches and organizations broadly agree on the importance of having business coaching qualifications (65% of coaches believed

these were very or extremely important to the organizations they coached for), and they also agree that business and organization experience is an even more significant part of the mix. Among coaches, 92% see business experience (for example) as very or extremely important to their clients, while among organizations, the comparable figure was also 92%. Interestingly, organizations put a much larger stress on continuous improvement and ongoing learning (84% see it as very or extremely important) than do the business coaches themselves.

In terms of learning, one message that came through loud and clear is that respondents

are strongly in favor of having a "portfolio route" (a self-paced learning process with a learning advisor) available as an option for achieving all WABC qualifications. 68% of respondents indicated they'd

WABC's defining business coaching standards are seen as important foundations

be interested in this option, with 61% of those noting that a portfolio route would be a better fit for their work schedules and other time constraints.

WABC's defining business coaching standards

WABC's standards are also seen as important foundations for the coaching practices of respondents. WABC's Credential Verification policy, Professional Standards for Business Coaches, Business Coaching Competencies, Business Coaching Definition, Membership Standards, Program Accreditation Standards, and Professional Development Record... all are seen as moderately to extremely important, and it is gratifying to note that the one seen as the most important of all is the WABC's Code of Business Coaching Ethics and Integrity (rated as very or extremely important by 77% of respondents).

The WABC brand

Certainly the findings regarding WABC's qualifications and standards underline and reinforce what respondents tell us about WABC's brand — and by extension, our vital, ongoing role in the industry. Our brand is positively associated with ideas like distinctive professionalism, excellence,

proven quality, integrity, trust, reliability, reputation, positive and engaging, expertise, credibility, global reach and perspective, leading authority, and highest standard-setting — and though we also know there's work to be done in better communicating this to the wider world, we're heartened to hear that our efforts have clearly been pointed in the right direction all this time.

Pointing to our future

We've gleaned a range of additional insights from this survey — ones which will help us greatly in setting our course for the next few years. For example, we've heard from respondents that business coaching itself needs to be more clearly defined and evangelized, that the Asia-Pacific region is an under-served region for coaching and that keeping up with technology and business change is a priority.

Finally, in terms of products and services, including professional development opportunities and events (whether virtual or in-person), respondents have given us a wealth of suggestions and feedback to digest.

As our plans mature, we look forward to updating our key stakeholders on all of this — and we thank all of you who took time out of your busy lives to respond for helping us better understand your world and our role in it.



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