

THE VALUE OF ONLINE ACADEMIC COACHING

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*"Hello Nara,
I hope your weekend has been relaxing. I am still working
away on the assessment but I have to admit I am
struggling. My organisation (that I have selected for my
assignment) doesn't have a lot of evidence that has been
useful in preparing my plan."*

That looks like a perfect opportunity to coach a person and to address their concerns or gaps in their learning. These students are not freshmen or sophomore. These are seasoned experts, having more than a decade of industry experience (some even two decades or more).

Online learners in Australia come from various walks of life-project managers, consultants, digital marketers, educators, music teachers, government personnel, and even CXOs or business owners. People come for online learning for different reasons - to strengthen their subject matter expertise, to explore a new area of interest and many for better career prospects.

Most of them are time-poor, with their work taking a significant portion of their week. Some even have two jobs. Add to this their family commitments, spending an additional 15 - 20 hours a week on studying is a stretch. In a course of compressed learning format (7-8 weeks), a week's business travel or a personal emergency can disrupt their study plan significantly.

As their Academic Coaches, we have a great opportunity to help students maintain their pace of learning. Missing a week or two can significantly hamper their learning progress and effectiveness. While online programs from different universities provide general guidelines for all students, coaches fill the gap in tailoring the approach for individual

student needs and ensure their progress and eventual success in the course. The message I shared at the start of this blog was received at the beginning of an assignment period. It is an opportunity to create a personalised approach for the student - to identify the gaps in the individual's situation vis-à-vis the learning requirements and help them bridge the same.

As coaches, we come across many first time learners or people returning to school after many years. Familiarising with tools and helping them to "learn how to learn" becomes an important task. People get easily overwhelmed with the many 'unknowns' in the learning environment. By the time they get acclimatised to the learning environment and start reading the text, a little more than a few days delay in schedule can create doubts in their minds about their ability to complete the course successfully. Assuring them of support while ensuring their progress at the same time becomes important for the students.

Most of the students are diligent in taking notes. However, most, if not all, struggle when it comes to synthesising their learning and creating a report that is required as part of an assignment. Coaches play a very important role in helping students relate their understanding of frameworks and theoretical knowledge to their chosen business problem.

Literature review is new for most students. Guiding them to know the importance of substantiating their claims through literature or inference from their data collection, strengthening their claim through the use of frameworks and creating a story to draw appropriate conclusions are areas where students realise the benefit of taking coaches' help. Academic referencing is alien to most of the students during their first course. Helping them to ensure that their work is original and credits are given where due to the original

authors is a constant effort for academic coaches. In any form of management education, people don't just learn from their coursework. A significant part of their learning comes from peer interactions. Not all learners prefer to communicate online. Not all programs mandate an online engagement of students through discussion forums. Academic coaches have an important role to play in getting students to engage online and participate in discussion forums. Academic coaches have an important role to play in getting students to engage online and participate in discussion forums, especially during the early weeks of the course.

Coaches can't play the game for the student. They guide them to success, ensure that students learn the relevant theory and frameworks for each course, progress well with their assignments and of course, finish the course successfully. While the learning requirement for a course remains the same for every student, individual attention is required for each learner to succeed and that is where the challenge, as well as reward for an academic coach lies. ■