

Activating the AI Coach

Effective Implementation Strategies for CHROs

22 OCTOBER 2025

Chief human resources officers (CHROs) should select AI coaching tools carefully, pilot them mindfully, and then gradually extend them to all workers and managers. This guide, part of a two-part series, provides a structure for implementing AI coaching across the workforce and references insights gained from recent interviews, experiments, and a survey. The companion report, *A Coach for Every Worker: Scaling Access and Performance with AI*, examines how AI coaches are being deployed in workplaces today: where they excel, where they fall short, and how to optimize their use.

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- CHROs navigating budget constraints and talent needs should plan for a near-term future in which AI coaches can deliver 90+% of coaching needs with consistent reach, quality, and reliability.
- CHROs should augment human coaches with AI to magnify their impact. AI coach assistants can follow up and interact with clients, analyze coaching transcripts, suggest topics for exploration, and find patterns across months or years of sessions.
- CHROs should stay ahead of rapid advancements. AI coaches are evolving from “advising” to “accompanying.” The most advanced AI coaches will not just respond, but resolve—proactively reaching out, anticipating needs, building hypotheses about the individual, and dynamically supporting them through their workday.

AI Can Satisfy Most Coaching Needs for Workers and Middle Managers

Currently available AI coaching platforms let CHROs extend high-quality coaching to every worker and manager in the organization. Experian, for example, has rolled out AI coaching enterprise-wide with [notable successes](#), including as a leadership development tool. Indeed, the tools could quickly evolve toward a model where AI delivers 90%+ of workplace coaching—including goal tracking, feedback rehearsal, meeting prep, nudges, and after-action learning—with consistent reach and reliability across the enterprise. For CHROs managing constrained budgets and broad talent needs, AI coaching might fill a vital developmental gap: coaching for every worker and manager, with human experts reserved for high-stakes, emotionally charged, or values-laden moments.

Enterprise-wide Implementation of AI Coaching

A Fortune 500 company set out to democratize coaching beyond a few hundred leaders to tens of thousands of employees. After surveying multiple tools, leadership piloted a dedicated AI-coaching platform because it felt natural and conversational, could be trained on their leadership framework, worked across languages, and—critically—had guardrails to minimize hallucinations and protect confidentiality.

Leaders pursued a methodical, slowly expanding pilot phase, leveraging Business Resource Groups to spread the word and ensure even adoption. Selection criteria included a need for in-the-flow access: desktop and mobile, voice interaction for natural-feeling conversations, and the capability for progressive integration with Teams, Workday, and other talent processes to make coaching part of the day-to-day ecosystem rather than a separate tool.

Implementation required cross-functional governance as well as technology. Talent, HR tech, legal, procurement, and global technology jointly vetted security and privacy, established centralized support for unique cases (e.g., language detection glitches or rare hallucinations) and, most difficult of all, worked with their vendor to flag AI coaching conversations where “red line” topics were discussed (e.g., intent to commit a crime, perform violence, etc.).

Users reported high utility and strong affinity (“a partner I can’t get through the day without”). 65% returned to AI coaching during the pilot. Leaders expect this usage to climb to over 80% as the system extends across the workforce. High-potential leaders (300-400) will continue to use human coaches, with the AI coach amplifying value between sessions.

Use cases for AI coaching in the firm are regularly expanding (e.g., performance reviews, manager/employee feedback, presentation prep, and culture nudges). Leaders will soon implement automatic AI interventions (e.g., events that trigger timely

coaching). As deployment widens internationally, they expect aggregate themes to emerge from thousands of AI-guided conversations, revealing real-time patterns in skills, sentiment, and culture while preserving individual privacy.

Successfully implementing AI coaching, however, raises stakes for trust, ethics, and workforce acceptance. CHROs should consider a privacy-by-design stance (including encryption, minimal data retention, and aggregate-only reporting), ensure there is a “human-in-the-loop” for sensitive topics, and align with legal and communications teams as well as employee resource groups early. Workers should also have opt-in controls for integration features (e.g., calendar/email analysis). Analysts should monitor leading indicators of trust (e.g., return-use rates, consent rates for higher integration features, and complaint volumes). CHROs who invest in governance and integration that delivers safety at scale should be able to reach 90% coverage, capturing enormous value at a relatively lower cost without compromising people, privacy, or culture.

Human Coaches Should Use AI as a Powerful Analyst

Human coaches should not [fear AI will replace them](#). Executive-level coaching conversations—where power, politics, influence, and reputation management enter—demand human coaches. In these circumstances, studies ([including our own](#)) show that workers and leaders see value in augmentation over full automation.

In other words, AI might perform low and mid-level coaching but only assist human coaches at the high end. Where human coaches are appropriate (e.g., in high stakes circumstances, and typically at the senior leader and executive levels), professional human coaches remain central but should integrate AI into their practice rather than avoid it.

Before, during, and between coaching sessions

Before coaching sessions, AI can automate administrative tasks such as matching coaches and clients and then onboarding clients. AI coach assistants are well suited to help coaches with tasks like client intake surveys that explore their preferences, aspirations, and expected outcomes from coaching.

These and other use cases can reduce the burden on human coaches and help clients clarify their objectives prior to the first meeting. AI-coaching platform leaders interviewed for this report emphasized that automated intake systems free up time for human coaches to focus on building relationships and understanding context rather than chasing down logistics.

» *“AI was very useful in drafting a specific, thoughtful written plan with steps to be followed and refer to. I would like to take that plan and use it as part of a discussion with a human coach.” –Interviewee*

Between sessions, AI can play an even more valuable role. Human coaching engagements often include long gaps of weeks or months during which clients may struggle to maintain momentum. AI assistants can bridge these gaps. According to an interviewee, AI should be used to “check in and follow up with clients on what was discussed in the previous human coaching session”. These nudges, grounded in goal theory, reinforce accountability and help clients translate insights into action.

In a [peer-reviewed paper published in 2022](#), the authors described how an AI coach prompted users to articulate goals, commit to specific actions, and then regularly report progress; it “nudged the participants to write down their goals and asked questions to test how feasible and realistic these goals were,” and it “helped the participants create action plans to reach their goals.” Participants in the AI career-coaching survey ([see companion report](#)) echoed the value of this ongoing support: many said the tool helped them organize tasks, remember past sessions, and follow through on next steps.

During coaching sessions, AI can assist in real time. The human coach leads the process while leveraging AI analyses of interactions with coachees. The AI can suggest coaching questions in real time and identify client behavioral and cognitive patterns. Some coaches already use AI-powered note-taking and sentiment analysis tools that capture keywords, summarize themes, and flag potential blind spots for follow-up. These and other tools that automatically extract key moments from conversations and suggest topics to explore can help coaches stay fully present and alert them to subtle signals that might otherwise be missed.

Leader Development Coaching

A senior human capital executive at a large US services company oversees talent acquisition, diversity & inclusion, and leadership development for 30,000 employees. In 2025, he piloted an AI coach not just to generate meeting notes or to summarize emails, but to guide his own career development and support hiring and inclusion initiatives across the enterprise.

He began by asking his AI coach to generate an individual growth plan linked to the company’s leadership expectations and its 70–20–10 development framework. He prompted the AI to analyze his meetings, email threads, performance reviews, and collaboration platform files, and then recommend two development areas critical to his career aspirations. The AI produced a comprehensive growth plan summarizing his current role, targeted roles, key stakeholders, success metrics, communication strategies, and timelines.

This executive compared the results to years of mentorship and concluded that, for hard skills and competency development, his AI coach “delivered 85-90% greater insight than human coaches,” in part, he believes, because human coaches only know what he tells them, whereas the AI can mine years of communications and documents to reveal patterns.

He does not believe AI should replace human coaches in all circumstances. He still values the deep corporate insight and advice on navigating corporate politics that he receives from seasoned coaches. For him, AI excels at analyzing past actions, summarizing strengths, and suggesting structured actions, while humans provide context, empathy, and organizational wisdom.

After coaching ends

Following the conclusion of a human coaching program, AI can prolong and deepen the coaching effect. AI assistants can act as a trusted sounding board that highlights coaching milestones and inspires coachees to stay committed to their broader aspirations. In addition, AI tools can transcribe and analyze entire coaching conversations. Importantly, AI can detect patterns across *multiple* coachees, highlighting systemic organizational issues and common employee developmental needs. This kind of cross-session analysis is difficult for coaches within organizations to perform manually. For example, while maintaining privacy and anonymity, AI can identify trends and patterns across the organization's entire portfolio of coaching interventions, making coaching programs significantly more strategic.

Integrating AI into a coaching practice does not diminish the human element; rather, it extends a coach's reach and can enrich the developmental journey. By automating administration, sustaining engagement between sessions, analyzing transcripts, and spotting patterns across months of work, the AI coach can free human coaches to focus on empathy, intuition, and creativity. As one interviewee put it, "AI keeps the drumbeat going so I can concentrate on the music." When used thoughtfully and ethically, AI becomes a multiplier—amplifying the coach's impact while making personalized development more accessible.

As They Evolve, AI Coaches Will Resolve—Not Just Respond

Advanced AI coaching deployments show AI coaches moving beyond on-demand "advice engines" to always-on companions that work before, between, and after user prompts. Rather than waiting passively, advanced AI coaching systems can monitor emails, calendars, goals, and workflow signals to anticipate what a manager or individual contributor will need next (e.g., drafting agendas before a tough 1:1, surfacing prior commitments before a board update, or proposing a rehearsal plan ahead of a high-stakes presentation). The AI coach can build and update hypotheses about the individual (e.g., strengths, triggers, blind spots, and preferred tactics) from months of interactions and artifacts, then test those hypotheses with targeted questions and simulations. The result might feel less like a tool and more like a teammate that remembers, follows up, and drives progress.

AI as a Recruiter Tool and Coach

A VP of Talent Management at a 25,000+ employee firm extended his AI coaching pilot from career coaching to talent acquisition, using it to calibrate candidate selection built

on competencies and values aligned with the firm’s growth strategy. He crafted prompts that asked the AI tool to compare candidates against these competencies, identify gaps, propose follow-up questions, and even rank applicants based on their potential to lead transformational change. After hiring panels reached consensus, he fed interview notes back into the tool to check whether the human assessments aligned with the AI’s recommendations and to expose potential bias. He also created recommended prompt templates and guidelines to minimize the risk of discriminatory or irrelevant outputs. Throughout, he emphasized to his team that the AI’s role is to coach for better decisions, not to make them—recruiters and hiring managers still make final choices.

Instead of merely suggesting options, an AI coach can trigger actions and close loops. For example, after an important meeting, a manager’s AI coach might complete a series of follow-ups. Beyond summarizing the meeting, the AI might request feedback from participants, then consider the feedback and analyze relevant documents and/or email threads to suggest next steps to the manager. It might then generate a draft agenda for the next meeting and schedule a debrief for a senior leader.

At scale, these “accompanying” behaviors can create a continuous improvement layer across the enterprise—nudging performance management from episodic reviews to ongoing coaching, making experiential learning a low cost and low risk daily practice, and supporting change initiatives with real-time behavioral cues. Aggregated (and privacy-preserving) insights over months of interactions can give CHROs a live map of emerging skills, sentiment shifts, and culture adherence that traditional surveys can’t match.

AI as a Diversity Coach

AI can provide insight into diversity and inclusion. One senior HR leader interviewed aims to connect all of his organization’s respect, inclusion, and belonging initiatives to business outcomes—something his AI coach helps him with. By integrating engagement survey data, exit interviews, and annotated HR notes, he asks the coach to pinpoint which business units or demographics experience drops in respect, empowerment, or belonging. The AI coach then recommends targeted learning interventions and suggests internal or external modules to address uncovered issues.

He is also using AI to help him develop a “curriculum pathway”—a series of entry-level to executive-level courses aligned with the firm’s leadership pillars. AI curates the most relevant content, saving hours of manual review. He brands these efforts as “high-performance team building,” embedding inclusion principles into broader leadership expectations to avoid politicized distractions.

For CHROs, the opportunity is to design for accompaniment: integrate the coach where work actually happens (e.g., mobile, voice, collaboration platforms, and ERPs), authorize limited, auditable automation to resolve routine tasks, and institute privacy-first guardrails (e.g., clear red-line escalation, encryption, role-based access, and aggregate-only reporting). Success metrics should move beyond usage to outcomes—such as percentage of nudges acted on, time to prepare for critical conversations, quality of manager/employee check-ins, and improvement in team outcomes. With AI coaching executed well, AI will advance the work, multiplying human coaching where it matters most while elevating organizational EQ in the background.

AI as a Personal Health Coach—Implications for Workplace Wellness

When a senior development manager at a US university was diagnosed with breast cancer, she used an AI assistant as a constant coach—recommending specialists, translating pathology results, explaining estrogen and progesterone receptor status, summarizing clinical evidence, and assembling personalized decision trees that clarified options beyond the default “surgery–radiation–drug therapy” pathway.

The AI’s continuity—remembering prior sessions and lab/scan results, linking genetic and cardiology markers to cancer treatment decisions, and surfacing lifestyle levers—helped her challenge one-size-fits-all care, request biomarker testing, reject radical options, and hold more substantive consultations with clinicians. In short, AI turned fragmented 15-minute visits into a coherent, ongoing conversation, replacing bafflement with agency.

By closing the information and confidence gap between medical appointments, this leader’s AI coach reduced her anxiety, supported informed choices, and enabled her to coordinate absence plans with executives, clients, and team members. For employers, this suggests a scalable wellness benefit: privacy-preserving AI health coaching that complements employee assistance programs and care navigation, improves health literacy, and helps workers become active partners in their own care—ultimately supporting better outcomes.

CHRO AI Coaching Playbook

CHROs should consider adopting a tiered and blended model, offering AI coaching to every worker as a first-line resource for tactical and day-to-day support, while reserving human coaches for complex, sensitive, or strategic issues. We recommend that CHROs:

- **Establish criteria for escalation to a human coach.** These criteria could include emotional distress or critical career decisions. Ensure clear communication about when employees will interact with a person versus an AI coach.
- **Test and vet AI coaching tools rigorously.** Get started with AI coaching using tools already at the organization's disposal, such as Copilot or corporate ChatGPT accounts. As [our experiments](#) revealed, these tools can engage in powerful coaching conversations. To capture the full value of AI coaching, however, explore dedicated platforms. In the selection process, emphasize user adoption, security, privacy, and each tool's ability to integrate seamlessly and securely with the communications and productivity platforms workers and managers use every day.
- **Build psychological safety and transparency.** Ensure that a chosen AI coaching solution provides confidentiality. [Interviewees](#) warned that AI coaching can feel like surveillance if employees don't understand how their data will be used. Communicate that AI agents do not monitor individual performance, nor report anything specific that a worker might discuss with an AI coach. Organizations should obtain explicit consent for data collection and use aggregated, anonymized coaching data to improve workforce management, but not to make high-stakes employment decisions.
- **Ensure ethical and inclusive design.** AI systems may reflect biases in their training data. Partner with developers to audit and improve algorithms. Establish governance to address fairness, privacy, and data security. The [International Coaching Federation's emerging standards](#) provide guidance.
- **Train coaches and managers to work with AI.** The research suggests that coaches' fear of AI diminishes when they receive evidence-based training about the technology's capabilities and limitations. Invest in upskilling coaches and line managers so that they can interpret AI insights, customize them to the organization's values and culture, and integrate them into their coaching conversations.
- **Monitor outcomes and iterate.** Use surveys and qualitative feedback to gauge AI coaching's impact. In [the career coaching experiment](#), participants praised the AI's ability to spark new perspectives, but complained when the tool hallucinated facts or repeated stock phrases. As such, treat AI coaching as an evolving tool that can deliver immediate and escalating returns if monitored and improved continuously.

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Valence delivers AI-driven coaching at enterprise scale—giving every manager a confidential, always-on coach aligned with company values. Its AI coach Nadia blends deep context, real-time feedback, and personalization to transform leadership development and drive measurable team performance.

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