

EZRA

Why coaching works

The science behind the
superpower that changes
people and business



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Written by:
Sinéad Keenan,
Chief Innovation Officer
and Head of **EZRA Labs**

EZRA Labs

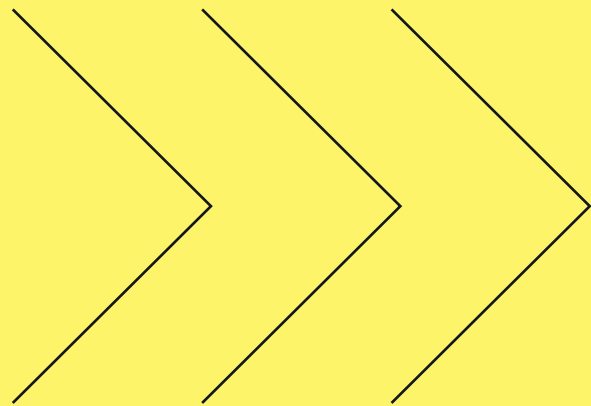


EZRA Labs is a center of excellence at the heart of EZRA brimming with the brightest minds in behavioral science, coaching and L&D.

Its mission is to bring the latest thinking and insight to people and organizational challenges. Working closely with our clients, the team designs products and solutions that create positive behavioral change and drive organizational impact.

Dana,
RVP, New Business

A boom to believe in



Thom,
Global Master Coach

The effectiveness of professional coaching is clear. Coaching creates cognitive and behavioral shifts which have a direct impact on performance.

For organizations five years ago, professional coaching was **expensive, elitist** and **slow**.

Because it came with a significant price tag, it was typically reserved for only a handful of people. And because it called for face-to-face meetings and long commutes out of the office, it used to take a long time to schedule (and subsequently, to see results).

Flash forward to today, and the world looks very different. The majority of organizations across the world now offer coaching – and what's more, they can see it works.

Coaching industry snapshot:



70%

of organizations offer coaching¹



70%

of participants improve their performance²



18%

increase in productivity among EZRA coachees vs control group at major global bank³

So what's changed?

Everything...

The pandemic has changed how we see and do workplace learning. Virtual coaching makes it easy to slot self-development into people's day-to-day. And L&D leaders are seeing that it really works – we're lucky enough to hear it straight from participants:

WE KEEP HEARING:

“Coaching is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Now, I know I'm a boss. I can go into that room. I can make that decision.”⁴

Annie Moore

Logistics Project Manager,
Brambles

Brambles

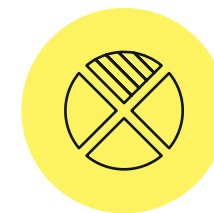
Emily,
Solutions Lead

And more and more, we're all seeing these personal success stories reflected in research and studies.

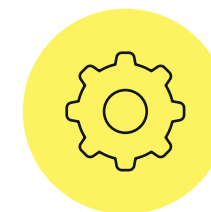
In 2015, a meta-analysis of research reported that coaching improves...



Our feelings at work – or affective outcomes



Our know-how and thinking – or cognitive outcomes



Our skills on the job – or skill-based outcomes



Our behavior and performance – or results outcomes.⁵

At EZRA, we like to talk about coaching as a 'superpower', because that's the kind of life-changing progress we see. But really, coaching isn't so supernatural. It's about psychology. It's about human behavior. So to understand why coaching works, let's start with the science of making people tick, and changes stick.



Behavior is complex, but not a mystery



Oly,
Talent Acquisition
Partner

Drawing on behavioral science research and models from Stanford⁶ and University College London⁷, we know three things need to work together if someone's going to change.

CAPABILITY

+

MOTIVATION

+

PROMPTS

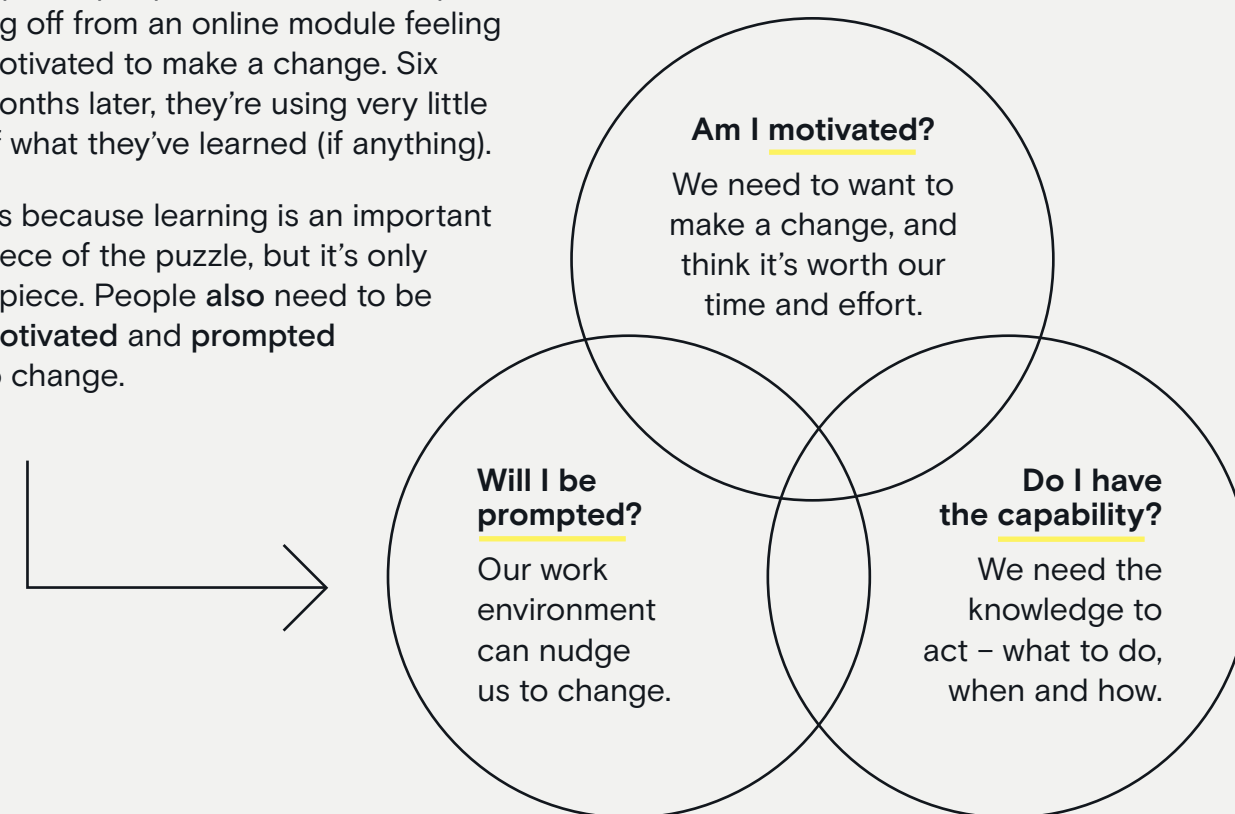
In our experience, most organizational attempts to change behavior fail because they focus (almost exclusively) on building **capability**. Organizing training, communicating processes, creating e-learns – it's all designed to share information.

But time and again, the pattern repeats: people leave a workshop or log off from an online module feeling motivated to make a change. Six months later, they're using very little of what they've learned (if anything).

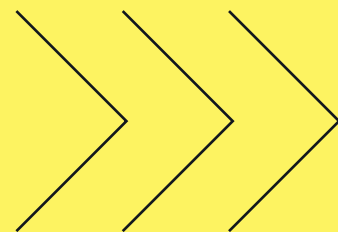
It's because learning is an important piece of the puzzle, but it's only a piece. People **also** need to be **motivated** and **prompted** to change.

\$370B

spent on L&D every year⁸



Why is this important? Because a singular focus on building skills, knowledge and capability – but without a clear strategy for how this will be embedded in the day-to-day — means all that potential remains untapped and we don't see the organizational benefit from our investment.



This has a name...

The 'knowing-doing gap'⁹



You know how to make a change, but you don't make a change. As deadlines loom and phones ring, it's easier to keep working the way you've always worked than it is to try something new. And when you're only accountable to yourself, who's to know anyway?

Coaching is different. Coaching cuts through. We see it bridge this knowing-doing gap. Performance improves. People are promoted. They stay with the company for longer.

So what's going on?



Ifalase,
Coach Partnership
Manager

Five insights into why coaching works

INSIGHT 01

We change best when we feel successful



There's a bit of a buzz around failing in businesses today. Fail fast, learn faster and all that.

But the truth is, our wins help us develop far more than our missteps. When we feel we're doing well at something, we keep doing well. It's not an observation; it's backed by research.

Jessie,
Business Developer

In one study¹⁰, participants took a test and were either given success or failure feedback:



SUCCESS FEEDBACK:
'Here's what you got right'

80%

Test performance after **success feedback**



FAILURE FEEDBACK:
'Here's what you got wrong'

59%

Test performance after **failure feedback**

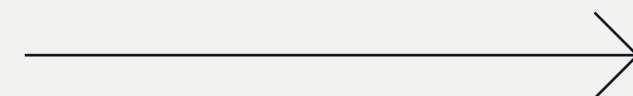
Overwhelmingly, people who were given success feedback went on to perform better than their counterparts on subsequent tests.

Coaching is built on this principle. A coach won't dwell on what's going wrong or where you could be better. They'll help you recognize what you're already good at – and nudge you to do more of it. They'll notice your successes and remind you of them. And if there are home truths to face, they always handle them sensitively.

In short, all our coaches are people. They built a positive environment, establish rapport and get participants into that success mindset.

5:1

The magic ratio: for every constructive piece of feedback, aim to give **five pieces of positive reinforcement**.¹¹



INSIGHT 02

We're motivated when we see & feel progress

When was the last time you had a great day at work? Not okay, not good – **great?**

What happened? Did you smash your sales target? Or present a project you'd been working on for weeks? Or maybe you really connected with a colleague you'd been struggling to see eye-to-eye with?

When Harvard professor Teresa Amabile asked people to rate their days in this way, one thing stood out: our best days at work are when we meet a goal or make real headway toward it. It's called the progress principle, and it's a big part of what motivates people professionally.

A study of

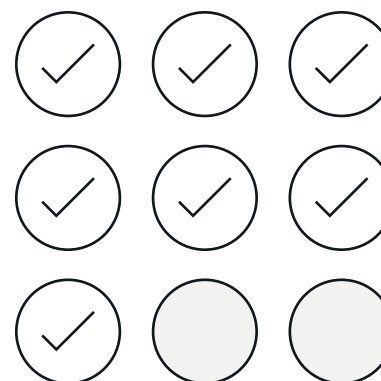
12,000
diary entries

Found that our best days at work are when we've made progress on a task or goal – and our worst days are the ones with setbacks.¹²



WITH A COACH

MANAGEABLE CHUNKS



But when you're in the thick of projects, plans and people management, it's easy to miss the progress you're making. With coaching, you carve out a space and place to reflect.

A coach can hold up a mirror to help you count the steps you're taking and the wins you're making.

Often, these steps and wins might feel small, and that's deliberate. A coach breaks big goals into manageable chunks, or little changes people can make every day. And when you spread coaching wider, these incremental gains soon add up to big organizational outcomes.

INSIGHT 03

Without accountability, we fail

Humans are rational creatures.

We're unlikely to put time and effort into something without seeing an immediate reward. Add to this the fact that it's very easy to overestimate our future intentions (there's a reason why New Year's resolutions are hard to keep...).

Nathan,
Account Executive

The stakes don't feel high enough. Until, that is, you add someone else into the mix.

A CASE STUDY

Dean Karlan is an American economist. In 2007, he was trying to lose weight – but as plenty of us know, diets are hard to stick to. So Dean found himself struggling... until he signed a so-called 'commitment contract' with a friend who also wanted to lose weight.

They both agreed to pay a penalty to the other for every week they failed to hit their target. It worked; "I've lost 25 pounds and I've kept off," Dean says. Ultimately, we are motivated by a sense of **social accountability**.¹³



In other words...

It's easy to let yourself down. It's harder to let someone else down.

And it's why interns have mentors and addiction programs have sponsors – as people, we're more likely to change our behavior if we know someone else is checking in with us. If we **don't** have that accountability, it's far easier to do nothing.



A coach builds this sense of accountability by:

- **Acting as a 'guardian'**
They'll hold your feet to the fire (kindly) with regular one-to-one check-ins. Nobody wants to turn up to a session with nothing to report.
- **Raising the stakes**
When you know your business has **invested** in coaching on your behalf, you want to make the most of it.
- **Tracking your progress**
With EZRA Measure, we track every part of coaching – from who turns up to how well they're developing. And it's not just so L&D teams can see their ROI; the **mere-measurement effect** says that we perform better when we know we're being watched.

INSIGHT 04

‘Limiting beliefs’ are lurking below

We all have ‘limiting beliefs’ – assumptions, expectations and stories we share with ourselves that stop us making a positive change.

These beliefs are often unconscious and always unhelpful.

Sophie,
Chief of Staff

By listening patiently and asking the right questions, a coach will notice these beliefs – like when you’re avoiding a certain topic, doggedly pursuing another or dismissing certain possibilities altogether.

Once they’ve clocked these things, they’ll challenge your thinking so you can look to the future more positively.

Here’s how.



EXAMPLES OF LIMITING BELIEFS:

“ I can’t challenge people more senior than me.

“ I need to work overtime to show I’m dedicated.

“ If I put myself forward for that, I’ll fail.



Asking questions

Coaches use **Socratic questioning** – helping participants understand the situation better by answering questions on it.



Reframing ideas

A coach can take your limiting belief and flip it into something more realistic: **I have to always be right becomes it’s normal not to know the answer all the time.**



Shaping self-awareness

With these questions (and other techniques), coaches lead us to aha moments. We see ourselves clearly, and our neural maps even change.¹⁴



Highlighting ‘competing commitments’

Even when we hold a sincere commitment to change, there’s often a hidden competing commitment that gets in the way. For example, a leader might want to empower their team, but often (without realizing) also really want to be in control.¹⁵

INSIGHT 05

Prompts bridge the 'knowing-doing gap'

Learning is essential to behavior change.

But alone, it is not enough. A nudge and encouragement in the right direction, at the right time, helps seize opportunities.



Around the 2008 presidential election, Harvard scientist Todd Rogers knew that plenty of people said they'd turn out to vote. But fewer actually did.

His research showed that by answering a list of planning questions (not just *will you vote?* but *how will you vote?* *When will you vote?* *How will you get there?*), people were much more likely to hit the polling stations.¹⁶



Without knowing it, they'd created implementation intentions.¹⁷

IMPLEMENTATION INTENTIONS

An **implementation intention** is an 'if-then' statement that helps you get really specific about when and how you'll hit your goal. Coaches live and breathe them.

For example, if you're trying to improve your public speaking, your implementation intention might sound like this: **if an opportunity comes up to give a presentation, I'll take it.**

Or if you'd like to get better at managing your time, you might say: **if I'm getting overwhelmed with everything I need to do, I'll stop and make a priority list.**

It's all because concrete plans prompt us to act. And on top of this, just knowing a session is coming up acts as an extra prompt to put our intentions into action – we schedule that presentation or make that task list. Yes, because it helps us meet a goal. But also so we can report back to our coach.

Fola,
Director, Opportunity
Management UK & International



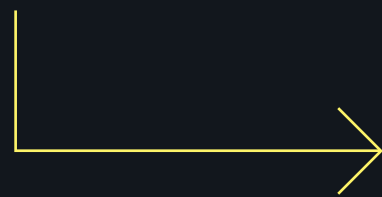
Now imagine all that at scale.

Coaching can create a big change in one person. But its real power lies in its potential for entire organizations.

So if you really want to bridge your organizational knowing-doing gap, you need to spread it further. What if everyone in your team was being coached to think more creatively, or inspire others, or champion diversity? What if everyone was being held accountable in those areas? What if **everyone** had their own goals and plans to make it happen?

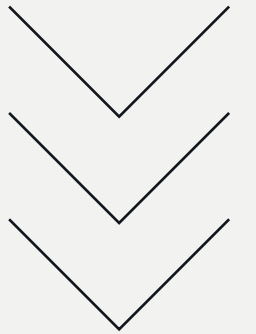
That's what we're all about. We've built EZRA to work as simply as video calling a friend or ordering groceries online, so it's easier to spread coaching further.

Because yes, coaching might be more of a psychological chain of events than a superpower. But when your whole organization goes through true behavior change, it sure enough feels like one.

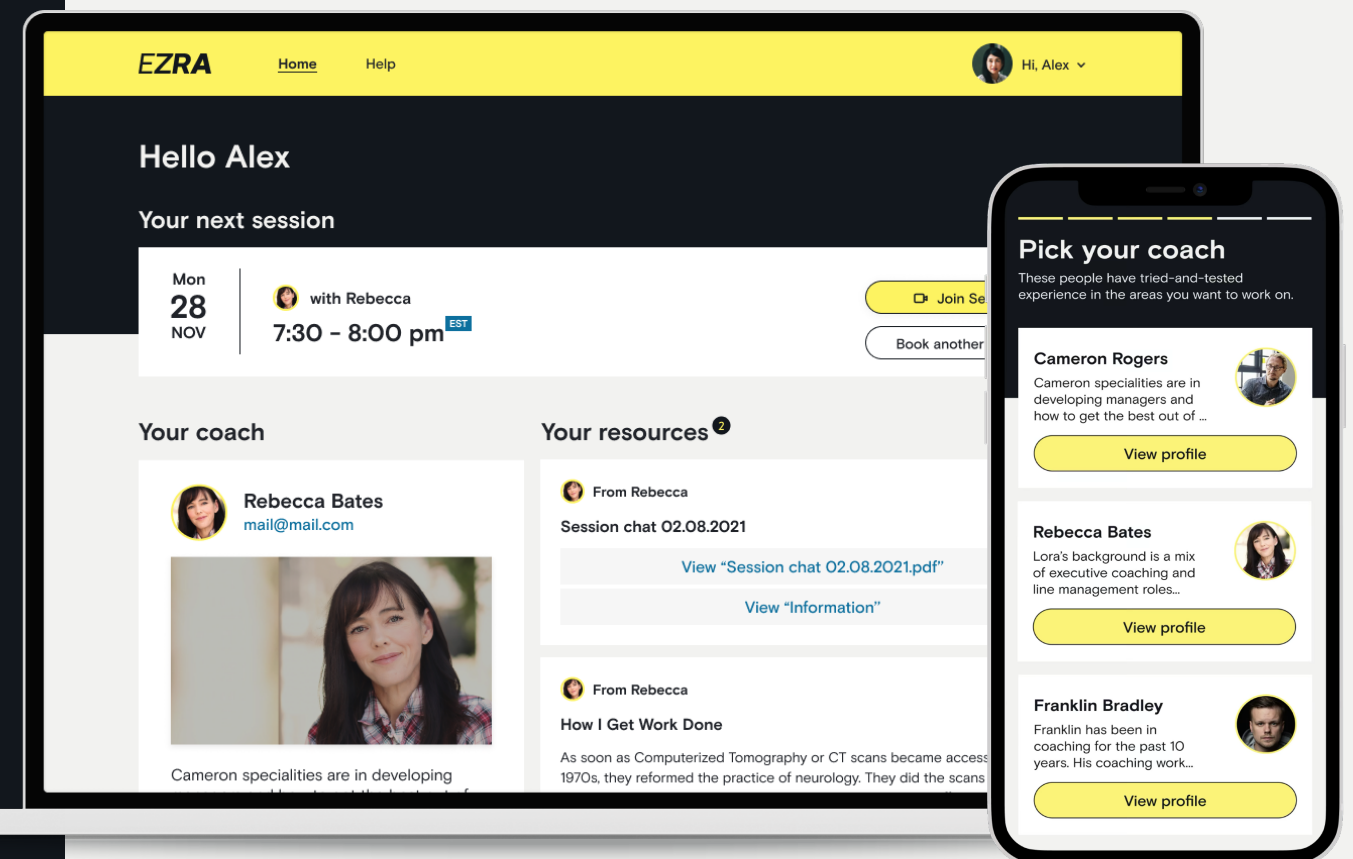


Experience **EZRA**

We apply these insights daily in our mission to democratize coaching and make it available to all individuals in all organizations.



VISIT HELLOEZRA.COM



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Notes



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