Happy almost-summer! I love this time of the year – when my flower and vegetable gardens are in, fresh, homemade salsa is around the corner and summer’s warm-weather activities (including outdoor running!) beckon.

I love to grow things, and my favorite “crops” to invest in are young, up-and-coming leaders. We’ve just completed our 2013-14 Transformational Leadership Program and the accomplishments of those bright, talented leaders are simply astounding. From launching new internal flexibility programs, overcoming the fear of speaking in a group or giving presentations, to deepening their staff relationships and developing $100,000 in new business – the progress that these future leaders of our profession have made is simply humbling.

We hope that you are busy growing your firm’s garden of potential leaders, too. And nothing facilitates growth and learning faster than “doing” or experiencing. That’s why we’ve dedicated this issue of Coaching Concepts to experiential learning. In Leadership Lessons, we’ll explore the benefits of formalizing an experiential learning component to your firm’s learning programs and, we’ll provide a framework for an experiential pilot program you can test this summer. In Practice Perspectives, we’ll explore eight specific activities you can take to provide learning experiences for your people. We hope you’ll consider “working your crop” with some of these ideas this summer.

And don’t miss this issue’s New News, where we feature our latest updates and those of our clients, too. In it, we provide a spotlight on our strategic Human Resources support services – something so many need as we continue to operate with a bumper crop of new business opportunities and a growing shortage of people to serve them.

When we’re not at home tending our gardens, we’re traveling the country facilitating strategic planning, delivering learning programs and connecting with our clients and friends in the profession. We hope to see you on our journeys and we always welcome a note or phone call to reconnect. Have a great summer!

Gratefully,

Jen
Develop Your People Faster By Investing In Experiential Learning

“Any firm that can outperform its competition in building and creating skills will gain a significant competitive advantage.”

- David Maister, True Professionalism

As a friend of ConvergenceCoaching, you know we’ve spent the last decade writing and teaching about the BIG TRANSITION coming in our country. **78 million Baby Boomers - the youngest of which are turning 50 this year - will leave our workplace in the next 10-12 years and the time to develop leaders and successors is NOW.**

In learning and development, there is a long-standing axiom called the **70-20-10 rule**. It states that people learn 70% of their knowledge through experiential or on-the-job learning, 20% through one-on-one coaching, mentoring and guidance and 10% through traditional classroom or online training programs.

The trouble is, most firms don’t understand this rule and instead expect their learners to develop their skills in the exact opposite ways. Often, on-the-job training is delivered ad-hoc, without any forethought or structure. **Universally, firms under-invest and under-estimate experiential learning and their people don’t progress at the pace that’s possible.** In this article, we’ll explore the benefits of experiential learning and how to change your firm’s mindset to value this type of learning more than you do today. Then, in our **Practice Perspectives** article, we’ll explore eight tangible activities to provide more experiential learning opportunities to your up-and-comers.

When you shift your firm’s learning culture to emphasize on-the-job learning more than classroom or online learning, you’ll:

- **Develop skills more effectively** - improving quality and efficiency

- **Reinforce learning they’re getting from other sources** – knowing something is simply not the same as doing it! Your people can take our online Conflict course and learn some new methods for addressing performance issues. But that doesn’t mean they can have those conversations effectively until they’ve practiced and done a few! Having seniors and managers sit in on performance appraisals for staff they’ve supervised on jobs or having them sit in on a difficult conversation can progress their understanding and ability to have those conversations immensely

- **Progress your people more quickly** – and for more firms time is of the essence!
• **Differentiate your firm from others** who simply don’t pay attention to this – which can provide you a competitive advantage when recruiting

• **Demonstrate that you care about your people.** When you allow your people to “ride along” on activities they’ve never experienced, like exposing tax staff to external client meetings or bringing an audit manager to a finance meeting with a banker, you show your interest in investing in them and they’ll feel – and reciprocate – your commitment

And, experiential learning doesn’t require a hard cost investment in an outside learning and development organization like ours. Your investment is the cost of planning and executing and most of the time, you’ll be bringing someone along on something you were going to do anyway!

Once you’re “sold” on the importance of experiential learning, the first step to shifting to a learning culture that values experiential learning almost above all other types of learning requires that you shift the mindset of your firm’s leaders. To make this cultural transition:

• **Forward this article and the Practice Perspectives article to your firm’s partners and learning leaders.** Ask them to read both and schedule a “physical” or virtual meeting to discuss it

• **Identify one or more ways you can “pilot” professionalizing your experiential learning from the ideas in the Practice Perspectives article.**

• **Choose a small number of firm leaders - managers, senior managers and partners - who are very good people developers or teachers.** Work with them to develop a “curriculum” of experiential learning opportunities.

• **Identify a pilot group of staff, seniors, supervisors and/or managers to act as your first “intentional experiential learners.”** We recommend these be some of your best and brightest, what we refer to as your “special sheep” in our Focus on Your Rising Stars newsletter, so that you can give them a “perk” and show that they are important to you.

• **Create a framework to consistently plan your experiential learning opportunities.** The plan should define:
  
  ○ **The “instructor”**
  
  ○ **The learners**
  
  ○ **The learning objective.** For instance, you might want to deepen relationship building skills, or develop someone’s ability to address performance issues, or teach someone to scope and price a project in the proposal process
  
  ○ **The experiential activity.** If the objective is relationship building, the activity might be attending three different meetings with the “instructor” where you meet with a referral source, a client and a prospect
  
  ○ **The supporting process.** Perhaps the supporting process around this relationship experiential learning might be:
    
    • **Instructor discusses the planned experiential learning with the learner** to enroll them
In participating

- **Instructor identifies the three meetings** in which to include the learner

- **Instructor connects with referral source, client and prospect to ask if they are okay if they bring along a staff person** to observe and learn. Instructor may encourage the referral source, client and prospect to do the same since they probably have up-and-comers to develop, too

- **Instructor sends meeting notice to the learner** for each meeting

- **Instructor provides “pre-work” to the learner** – perhaps reading the LinkedIn profiles, web site and firm files for each person ahead of the meeting and writing a brief synopsis of what they learned and what questions they might ask each person if they were leading the meeting

- **Instructor meets with the learner ahead of the meeting** to review their pre-work, share what they know about each person and what their objectives for the meeting are and agree on the role the learner will take (quiet “shadow” observer, active participant, meeting leader, etc. – the more experienced the person and the more meetings they’ve been attending, the bigger the role)

- **Instructor and learner conduct the meetings**

  - Instructor and learner debrief after the meetings. Instructor asks learner open-ended questions, “How did that go?” “What questions do you have about how the meeting progressed?” “What do you think our follow up actions or next steps should be?” “How do you feel about taking a more meaningful role in the meeting process next time?” “What did you learn and how do you feel about the experience?”

- **Instructor provides learner feedback.** “Here’s what worked that you should keep doing. Here’s what didn’t work as well that you should refrain from doing next time. Here’s what I’d like you to start doing going forward.”

- **Instructor might also ask the learner to handle any post-meeting follow up** – freeing the instructor up to do other things!

  - Evaluate your pilot process and then roll out a more formalized experiential component to your overall learning plans.

  - **Identify those who will participate meaningfully as instructors** and make them a formal part of your learning faculty.

  - **Tie experiential learning to your leadership goals and compensation** to make sure those who invest in the future capacity of your firm are rewarded for their efforts

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Bring your people along faster and differentiate your firm from the rest. Invest in intentional experiential learning programs today!
The Most Effective, Efficient Way to Develop Your People: Experiential Learning Opportunities

Most firms focus their learning initiatives on technical CPE, service methodologies and technology training. And, your team members with the highest level of technical competence are praised, rewarded, and promoted, until they reach the level of manager. At that point, most firms expect those same highly technical people to suddenly “sprout” leadership and management abilities. Yet, the 2012 PCPS Succession Survey states that 42% of the respondents feel that their number one challenge hampering their firm’s succession strategy is that “senior partners feel that younger members of the firm are not ready for leadership positions” – because they haven’t yet developed the expected “soft skills.”

As we explored in Leadership Lessons, experiential learning is critical to compressing development time and transferring knowledge into practical application. In this article, we will explore eight tangible activities to provide your up-and-comers “on-the-job” or experiential learning opportunities to develop their skills and give them the experience they need now to take on increased responsibility and enhance their leadership abilities within your firm.

Develop your team members by:

- **Taking them along to attend client, prospect and referral meetings** so that they can listen to the questions that are asked and see how you respond. They will learn what’s expected in these meetings as well as gain meaningful information about the client, prospect or referral source that they can also apply in their relationship development work. Let your client know in advance that you will be bringing a team member along and set the expectation both with the client and the team member that the team member’s role is to listen and potentially follow up on any actions identified in your meeting. **Your clients will welcome the investment you’re making in them and appreciate getting to know others in your firm.** You can even encourage your client to do the same with an up-and-comer on their team, as most clients face the same succession challenges you face.

If you are not doing so already, also allow your team members to communicate directly with clients during engagements (and prospects and referral sources). When you don’t, you become the bottleneck in serving the client and put the firm at risk when a client (or prospect or referral source)
only knows you at the firm. Making this shift requires that you set clear expectations about how communications should be handled, ensuring the client relationship manager or partner is copied on correspondence so there are no surprises and elevating issues or questions that are beyond your team member’s capabilities. **You’ll gain increased efficiencies, team member morale and client satisfaction when multiple relationships are fostered and you truly take a team approach to serving clients and managing relationships.**

- **Pushing higher-level work down.** We all could probably be better delegators, and we talk a lot about ensuring that we’re all working at our “highest and best use;” however, many of us do not take the time necessary to identify work that is no longer at OUR highest and best use to train someone else to do. Have your up-and-comers observe or shadow you on a client project and explain what you’re doing at each step. Then, have them complete a portion of work at a higher-level — but plan to carefully review it and be available for questions. Then, they should be ready to act on their own and only use you when needed. **This creates increased leverage while providing challenging and meaningful work – one of our young people’s top motivators!**

- **Sending them to conferences and training programs** outside your firm’s learning programs. This enables them to develop their leadership skills and other competencies and network with other professionals in your region or nationally to gain insights about how other firms are addressing staffing challenges, driving growth, improving realization, leverage and other important firm metrics and improving processes and efficiencies in their firm. Many state societies offer Young CPA Conferences and the [AICPA’s E.D.G.E. Conference](https://www.aicpa.org) attracts top talent across the country, offering top speakers on a variety of practice management topics your people should be learning. Charge your up-and-comers with coming back to your firm with their top three ideas to share with your leadership team and their peers. **Empower them to implement one of the ideas so that the firm gains from their learning and they develop their visioning, communication, planning and implementation skills.**

- **Teaching your team members what you know about practice economics.** We like to say that you should teach practice economics early and often! Most of your team members do not understand the success metrics or different levers that drive firm performance and growth. Understanding your key metrics – and how each team member can affect them – will help them understand how you measure success in your firm and what needs to be in place for new positions to open up as they look at promotion opportunities and your firm’s path to partner. **You’ll be surprised by the positive economic impact your people can make when they learn what behaviors influence them!**

- **Asking as many questions as you answer** so that your up-and-comers do the thinking and you guide them with additional insights. Too often, we allow ourselves to become the “magic eight ball” and then complain that our team members don’t think critically or problem solve on their own. You are doing a disservice when you provide all the answers and keep your team members from doing the thinking and research, struggling with their problem and identifying a solution, and sometimes even failing (while ensuring it’s safe for them to do so!). **These are some of the best teaching moments you can provide** and some of the best learning moments your team members will experience as they learn to generate solutions and build confidence in their answers, knowledge and expertise.

- **Assigning your up-and-comers special project work** by putting them forward on different projects or work assignments to help them **learn new skills, meet new people and stretch their abilities.** Some examples include creating the competencies for your A&A department and then mapping the learning requirements by level for each, putting together a committee to explore
how to further anytime/anywhere work opportunities in your firm, or streamlining your firm’s 1040
process for individuals not tied to an entity.

• **Allowing your team members to participate in planning, including your senior managers or non-equity partners in a non-voting capacity in your Executive Committee.** Give your team members – especially managers – visibility to your firm’s planning processes and allow them to meaningfully participate and weigh in on decisions about your firm’s vision and strategic initiatives. **Doing so provides them a greater sense of ownership and buy-in and will enable them to find opportunities to contribute more meaningfully.** As people progress in their careers and are on the path to partner, find ways to include them in higher level planning and decision making and give them exposure to “partner- level” discussions. Tailor the agenda to include non-partners for appropriate topics and then excuse them for what are truly partner-only discussion or decisions (and there aren’t that many that require them to be excused!).

• **Spending time with them!** Spending time with your team members and sharing your experiences, how your career progressed, how you approach developing client solutions, or how you handle objections raised by prospects are invaluable learning experiences for your team members. These opportunities also provide the additional benefit of allowing you to get to truly know your team members, see how they think and let them get to know you – one of the best employee engagement activities you could invest in!

Experiential learning opportunities are the most effective way to develop your people efficiently, in the timing your firm needs. Figuring out how to provide these experiential experiences is imperative to engage your team members and develop a pipeline of future leaders poised to take on new leadership roles. Get going on this today and sustain your firm well into the future!

**For additional information on developing your team members and providing them experiential learning opportunities**, contact Tamera Loerzel at tamera@convergencecoaching.com or (952) 226-1780.
On April 1, 2014, ConvergenceCoaching, LLC celebrated our 14th anniversary of helping leaders achieve success! We truly appreciate the opportunities we have to work with our clients, colleagues and friends over the years, sharing our company mission and pursuing our passions every day. We’re grateful for your trust, inspiration, and friendship and look forward to continuing our mission to drive transformational leadership in each and every individual and firm we touch!

Jennifer Wilson Honored at AAA 2014 Practice Management Conference

This year’s Association for Accounting Administration (AAA) 2014 National Practice Management Conference, held June 16-19, was a very special event as Jennifer Wilson was presented with the AAA Distinguished Service Award, the association’s highest honor. Jennifer has been an active member of AAA for nearly a decade and is very grateful to have received the honor.

Tamera Loerzel serves as President of the CPA Consultants’ Alliance (CPACA)

The CPACA announced in its April 17 press release that Tamera Loerzel would serve as President for the 2014-15 year. At the group’s annual meeting, members of the alliance discussed top issues facing the profession and its leaders. Each member identified their top leadership issue and one solution. You can read this in the CPACA blog at Leadership Insights & Tips for CPA Firms. Tamera is looking forward to leading this consultants’ group and continuing to collaborate with other thought leaders in the accounting profession.

From the press release:

“CPA firm leaders are faced with managing dramatic change due to succession planning, developing leaders, technology and consolidation,” said Tamera Loerzel, current President of the CPACA. “Our goal is to leverage our collective experience to collaborate, share ideas, generate strategies and develop educational offerings to help firm leaders manage change.”

For more information about the CPACA, visit www.cpaconsultantsalliance.com.

Jennifer Wilson’s Article is a CPA Insider Top Story of the Year

Jennifer’s June 2013 article on “A dozen public accounting ideas that don’t work anymore” received a lot of buzz! It was named a top story of the year in December when CPA Insider recalled it’s “most popular and informative articles.” Read the article here.

You may also be interested in Jennifer’s recent CPA Insider article entitled, “The eight attributes of high-functioning firms.” In it, she explores eight attributes common among the most high-functioning firms and how you can measure your firm’s alignment with them. Jennifer reflects on the article in our Inspired Ideas blog, here.
Anytime, Anywhere Work Survey

ConvergenceCoaching recently conducted a survey to collect data on the adoption of anytime, anywhere work initiatives by public accounting firms and the experiences firms have had with these initiatives. The data is being used to identify trends and will be published in an article or article series and used in various educational presentations.

Watch for upcoming articles analyzing the feedback we received from our over 100 firm respondents. Thank you to those who completed the survey for their firm, as your insight is valuable to the quality of the research!

Inspired Ideas Blog

Do you subscribe to our corporate blog? Our weekly Inspired Ideas blog features posts on a variety of topics related to leadership, sales and marketing, client retention, HR and organizational development, communication, governance and decision making, succession, personal development, and monthly “Leadership Spotlights” on leaders who are pioneers in their unique roles and responsibilities.

Some recent blog posts you may enjoy include:

- **It’s All About People Again!**
- **How High-Functioning is Your Firm?**
- **Re-Entry: Creating a Soft Landing**
- **Go Deeper in Your Relationships – Starting Now**
- **Don’t Deduct Your Health During Busy Season! Parts 1 and 2**
- **Are You Bucket Dipping or Filling?**
- **Two Simple Questions to Ask Your Clients**
- **Adapting When the Unthinkable Happens**
- **Can You Feel the Power Shift?**

To subscribe to our blog, click [here](#) and enter your email address in the field on the right side of the page, then click “Subscribe me!”

If you haven’t connected with us on our other platforms, click on any of the following icons to be directed to our sites!
Service Spotlight: Strategic HR and People Development Programs

Your people are your most important asset. When they are motivated and engaged, anything is possible. And with the impending labor shortage facing the profession, your people have options! To engage the best and brightest, your firm’s culture must be progressive and inviting, offer top notch HR programs and empower and support your HR personnel.

At ConvergenceCoaching, LLC, we work with firms to enhance their people programs by providing strategic planning, coaching, consulting and training and development programs in a variety of HR areas including:

- HR Strategy and Planning
- Recruiting Strategy and Support
- Learning and People Development
- Employee Engagement and Retention
- Diversity and Culture

Ask us about our one-year Strategic HR Coaching Program for firm leaders and/or HR professionals which begins with an employee engagement survey to understand your firm’s areas of strength and areas needing improvement to impact employee engagement and retention and enhance recruiting, too. We have a long history of advising HR professionals within CPA firms and believe there is no more important time to invest in your people programs and the people who run them. For more information about our HR services, contact Brianna Marth at (402) 639-4132 or brianna@convergencecoaching.com.

ConvergenceCoaching Strategic Partners

Our Strategic Partnership Program is designed to align with vendors that we believe will benefit our CPA clients and colleagues and enhance our Strategic Partners’ reach into the CPA profession.
Meet our Strategic Partners for 2014-2015:

**Avalara** ([www.avalara.com](http://www.avalara.com)) pioneered a service-based platform for sales tax and compliance automation and has been recognized for years as one of America’s fastest growing technology firms. Their cloud solutions help companies stay focused on their core businesses by providing automated end-to-end compliance services including sales and use tax calculation, exemption certificate management, filing and remittance, and a broad array of related services.

**CPAacademy** ([www.cpaacademy.org](http://www.cpaacademy.org)) serves as a clearinghouse for free, live online education in the accounting profession. By partnering with CPAacademy.org, presenters reach their intended audience with their marketing messages and gain access to an extensive database and growing membership. Whether you are a thought leader or an emerging leader, CPAacademy.org will support you in developing your marketing strategy, including presenting a webinar, offering an archived event, advertising a seminar, posting a job, or sponsoring the site.

For more information about our strategic partners, visit their websites or click [here](http://www.avalara.com).

If you are interested in becoming a Strategic Partner or have a suggestion for an organization that our clients, colleagues, and friends might find valuable, please download our flyer [here](http://www.avalara.com) or contact Brianna Marth at [Brianna@convergencecoaching.com](mailto:Brianna@convergencecoaching.com) or (402) 639-4132.

Further your visibility with CPA firm leadership and decision-makers by securing your position as a ConvergenceCoaching Strategic Partner!

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**Benchmark Your Firm: Take the 2014 INSIDE Public Accounting, Rosenberg MAP Survey and AICPA PCPS/TSCPA National MAP Surveys!**

**INSIDE Public Accounting’s Annual Benchmarking Survey, The Rosenberg MAP Survey**, and the **AICPA PCPS/TSCPA National MAP Survey** are excellent ways to benchmark your firm’s key metrics against your peers and compare management policies, financial results, and other key practice measures.

By participating in these surveys, you will receive a number of benefits and useful information that will allow you to evaluate how your firm compares to others in your geography and with other firms your size.

If you did not complete the INSIDE Public Accounting Survey by the June 9 deadline but are still interested in participating, you may contact [survey@plattgroupllc.com](mailto:survey@plattgroupllc.com) to request an extension.

The Rosenberg Survey is available for input until June 30 by clicking [here](http://www.avalara.com).
Client Corner

Accounting Today Top 100 Firms

Congratulations to our current clients who were named to the Accounting Today Top 100 Firms list: BDO USA, LLP, Schenck SC, Katz, Sapper & Miller, Decosimo CPAs, Miller Kaplan Arase LLP, Montgomery Coscia Greilich, LLP.

Clark Nuber PS, REDW LLC, Brown, Edwards & Company LLP, Green Hasson & Janks LLP, and Johnson Lambert LLP made Accounting Today's Beyond the Top 100: Firms to Watch list. Congratulations!

Welcome New Clients!

The ConvergenceCoaching team welcomes our new clients to the ConvergenceCoaching circle of friends! Warmest welcome to:

- Miller Kaplan Arase LLP in North Hollywood, CA
- Wilkin & Guttenplan, P.C. in East Brunswick, NJ
- Decosimo CPAs in Chattanooga, TN
- Dragon Benware CPAs, P.C. in Lake Placid, NY
- Voldal Wartelle & Co in Kirkland, WA
- Montgomery Coscia Greilich, LLP in Plano, TX
- Saltmarsh, Cleaveland & Gund in Pensacola, FL
- Johanson & Yau Accountancy Corporation in San Jose, CA
- Hantzmon Wiebel LLP in Charlottesvile, VA
- Bader Martin, P.S. in Seattle, WA

We are grateful that you have taken the ConvergenceCoaching leap of faith and look forward to making a difference for your organization!

Upcoming Web Seminars

The ConvergenceCoaching team offers web seminars designed to help you develop “soft” skills in a variety of areas while earning continuing professional education (CPE) credit for only $39 per person including CPE credit.

Join us for our upcoming 75-minute web seminars, which will be held at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Time on the following dates:

- **July 22** - The Twelve Questions You Should Ask Your Rising Stars
- **August 12** - Promoting Employee Wellness in Your Firm: An Exploration
- **August 28** - Managing Tax Workflow through Lean Techniques
Presented by Dustin Hostetler, Principal, Flowtivity

- **September - Promoting Employee Wellness in Your Firm: Success Stories**

Go to [www.convergencelearning.com](http://www.convergencelearning.com) to review the agendas and to register. You can also purchase the recording for any web seminar you’ve missed for just $39 at [www.convergencecoaching.com/news-and-events/recorded-webinars](http://www.convergencecoaching.com/news-and-events/recorded-webinars).

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**Upcoming Speaking Events!**

The ConvergenceCoaching team will attend and speak at a number of events this summer, including:

**June 16-20** – San Diego, CA  
AAA 2014 National Practice Management HR Fly-In and Conference  
Presentations:  
> Human Resource Fly-In Session: It's All About People – AGAIN!  
> Human Resource Breakout Session

**June 18-21** – Seattle, WA  
INPACT Americas Partners Forum Spring  
[www.inpactconference.com/](http://www.inpactconference.com/)  
Presentations:  
> Economic Data Survey – How Do You Stack Up? Looking in the 2013 Benchmarking Rearview Mirror  
> Clarifying Your Firm’s 2014 Strategy  
> Strategic Communications: Taking the Message Home

**June 19** – Albuquerque, NM  
New Mexico Society of CPAs Annual Business Meeting 2.0  
Presentations:  
> Developing a Culture of Ownership and Accountability

**August 27-28** – Atlanta, GA  
Georgia Society of CPAs Southeastern Accounting Show  
[http://www.gscpa.org/Content/SEAS.aspx](http://www.gscpa.org/Content/SEAS.aspx)  
Presentations:  
> Succession Planning and the Art of Letting Go Gracefully  
> Client Acquisition and Retention

**September 16-17** – Chamberlain, SD  
South Dakota CPA Society Annual Meeting & Convention  
Presentations:  
> Leading Change Amidst a Most Dynamic Market  
> Developing a Culture of Leadership and Accountability

**September 23** – Franklin, TN
Tennessee Society of CPAs Women’s Career Summit
http://bit.ly/1ltnERb
Presentations:
> Five Winning Strategies Every Woman CPA Should Know
> Managing Your Priorities and Knowing When to Say No

Take a look at the content and register today! We’d love to see you so let us know if you will be attending any of these events.

To access our catalog with a complete listing of topics for speaking, teaching, and custom in-firm programs, visit www.convergencecoaching.com/what-we-do/training-development/, and to keep track of updates to our speaking calendar, please visit www.convergencecoaching.com/events/upcoming/.

Spread the Word!

If you know someone who would benefit from receiving their own copy of our Coaching Concepts e-newsletters along with invitations to our web seminars and other events, e-mail their information to us at info@convergencecoaching.com.

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