



Room4More

THE BUILT4MORE NEWSLETTER

*On growth, change, and what coaching actually is.
Signal over noise.*

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Two documents crossed my desk this week, filed a day apart, written by people who have never met. One is a philosopher arguing that burnout arrives when a person turns into a project — something to optimise, with every choice quietly audited for productivity. The other is a team of researchers who read 196 studies on executive coaching and reported, in the careful language of an academic journal, that the identity of the person being coached was never once examined.

One says the self-as-project is what breaks people. The other says the research on helping them never looked at the self.

They arrived at the same door from opposite ends of the building. This issue is about what's behind it.

— *Philippe*

— THE COLD OPEN

01

They read 196 studies looking for the person. The person wasn't there.



Last year, four researchers set out to answer a simple question: when coaching works, what part does the coachee's identity play — the story someone holds about who they are and who they're allowed to be?

They did it the rigorous way. Sixty systematic reviews of coaching research screened; four met the bar. Inside those four sat 196 primary studies, published between 2010 and 2022, and the team read them all.

Here's what the field has been measuring: motivation, self-efficacy, personality traits, goal orientation. Here's what it reports as outcomes: performance improvement, self-awareness, goal specificity. Everything that can be scored, scaled, and compared — measured, diligently, for over a decade.

And in all 196 studies, the researchers found that leaders' identity work was never examined as an active ingredient. Not measured and found wanting — never examined. The layer where a person decides who they are was left off every instrument in the field.

Around the same time, a philosopher named Alec Stubbs published an essay about why we're burning out. His argument, built on Byung-Chul Han's work: we've internalised the productivity ethic so completely that the boss has been replaced by the self. The person stops being a subject and becomes a project — a thing to optimise, tracked and audited like any other asset.

Put the two side by side and something uncomfortable comes into focus. The research measured coaching exactly the way an achievement society measures a person: by output. The numbers got studied. The person underneath the numbers didn't.

— COACHING, DECODED

02

What gets measured gets managed. What decides doesn't get measured.

THE MYTH

Growth is what the numbers show. Performance up, goals hit, habits kept — if it moved a metric, it was real. If nothing measurable changed, nothing happened.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY GOING ON

The metrics live on the top layer. Underneath them sits the layer that decides — who you believe you are, what you're allowed to want, which version of yourself is permitted to show up on a Tuesday. That layer sets the goals before any goal-tracking starts. It decides which habits survive contact with a bad week. It's why two people can run the identical playbook and get different lives.

The researchers make a further point worth sitting with: a strengthened sense of who you are may be one of the few effects that survives after a coaching engagement ends. The goals fade, the accountability structure dissolves — the identity shift stays. Which would make the unmeasured layer not a soft extra but the part that lasts.

And here's where the philosopher earns his place. When the self becomes a project, the natural response to any dissatisfaction is to optimise harder — better metrics, tighter tracking, more output from the asset. That's more pressure applied to the top layer. The layer underneath, the one doing the deciding, gets nothing — except the bill.

Nothing here says stop measuring. Numbers are honest about what they can see. The trap is the quiet next step — concluding that what the numbers can't see isn't real. **The layer nobody measures is the layer doing the work.**

196

primary studies inside four systematic reviews of executive coaching research, 2010–2022, read in full by a research

team — in which leaders' identity work was **never once examined as an active ingredient of coaching**. A finding about the state of the research, not about outcomes: the layer wasn't measured, so nobody yet knows what it does.

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THE 2-MINUTE TRY

03

2 MIN · TRY IT NOW

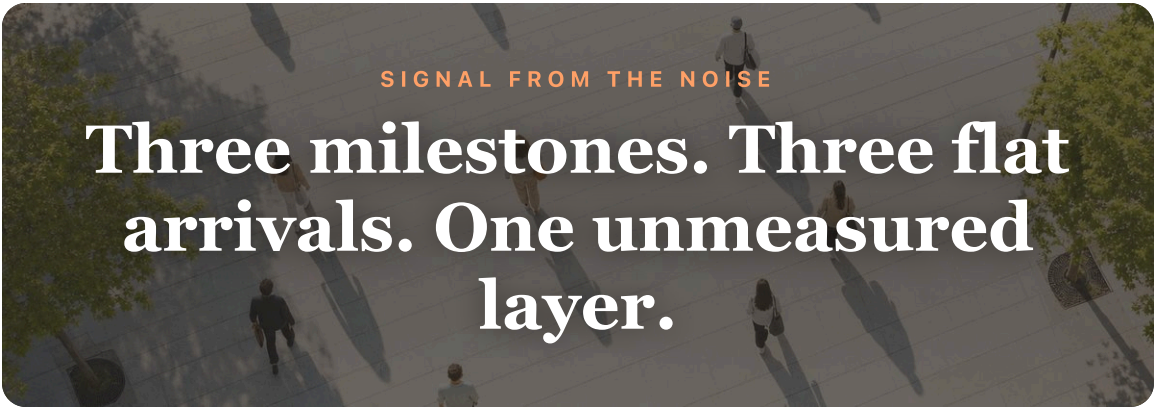
Audit the audit

Write down the three numbers you currently use to check how your life is going. Everyone has them — revenue, savings rate, weight, followers, hours billed. Don't overthink it; the first three that come to mind are the real ones.

Then write one sentence: *what do these three numbers know about me?*

And one more: *what do they not see?*

That's it. Keep the numbers — they're doing honest work. The point of the second sentence is only to notice what has quietly been left off the dashboard. If what you wrote there matters more to you than all three numbers combined, you've just located the layer this issue is about — in your own handwriting.



SIGNAL FROM THE NOISE

Three milestones. Three flat arrivals. One unmeasured layer.

The research gap would stay academic if real people weren't living inside it. Here are three, from three unrelated lives in the past few weeks. Each one did everything the measurable layer asked — the job, the title, the number — and each one is describing what the measurements missed. The handles are anonymous; the words are verbatim.

“Biglaw had allowed me to make work my whole identity, whole social life, etc. ... I thought being a workaholic meant you chose to work when you didn't have to. I realized I had stayed in a job that made that choice for me and it was deeply unhealthy and a way of avoiding my shit.”

TWO MONTHS AFTER LEAVING • R/BIGLAW • 47 POINTS

The job measured everything — hours, realization rate, bonus band. The one thing with no metric attached was what the job was standing in for. He found it the only way the unmeasured layer ever gets found: it was still there after everything measurable stopped.

“I thought finally getting the Doctor title would change things but I just feel empty. Friends and family say I should be proud and it is a massive achievement at 27 but I just don't see it that way.”

NEWLY GRADUATED • R/PHD • 6 POINTS

Six replies came back, and five of them were job-search advice — the measurable layer answering a question that wasn't asked. A title is a fact

about the top layer. “I thought it would change things” was always a hope about the layer underneath, and no certificate reaches down that far.

“Finally hit 100k in my 401k this week. Feels anticlimactic after years of watching it crawl up, but the math says it’ll snowball from here. Anyone else cross a milestone lately and just... shrugged?”

A SAVINGS MILESTONE · R/FINANCIALINDEPENDENCE · 3 POINTS

Notice the word he reaches for — *anticlimactic*. It’s the safe one: it describes the event, not the person, so nobody has to admit to being unhappy in order to say it out loud. And the math isn’t wrong — the number will snowball. The expectation that the day would feel different was never about the number.



“An expedition tracks everything — altitude, weather, supplies, hours of daylight. Whether the rope team holds is decided by something no instrument reads: the trust between the people on it. Most lives are organised the same way. The instruments are honest — they’re just not pointed at the layer that question lives on.”

FRANZ KOHLER

Built4More coach · coach, facilitator & explorer

BEFORE & AFTER

04

BEFORE

“I tracked everything — revenue, sleep, training load, even my mood, out of

AFTER

“I still track the numbers. I just stopped asking them questions they can’t

ten, in an app. Every metric was fine. I was not. And that combination wasn't supposed to be possible, so I assumed the problem was my tracking."

answer. Whether this life still fits the person running it was never going to show up in the data — it turned out I had to ask that one myself."

The dashboard didn't change. The question did.

— OVERHEARD IN A SESSION

“I can tell you my numbers for everything. You’re asking me the one thing I never counted.”

It wasn't a complaint — it was a discovery. A life can be fully instrumented and still have its most important room unlit. Not because anyone avoided it, but because the instruments all point the other way, and after enough years of reading them, what they can't see stops feeling like a real place.

— THE MAILBAG

05

Q *“I run my business on numbers, and it works. ‘The layer nobody measures’ sounds like a convenient home for claims nobody has to prove. If identity work matters so much, why hasn’t anyone measured it?”*

A Fair challenge — and the honest answer cuts both ways. The research gap isn't proof that identity work matters; it's proof that nobody looked. A field that claims to change people spent a decade measuring

everything about them except who they believe they are. That's not a verdict in either direction. It's an open file.

But notice that you already run your business on unmeasured things. Trust, reputation, judgment, whether a key person is quietly done — none of these sit in your P&L, and you'd never conclude they aren't real. You price them constantly; you just price them by attention rather than instrument. The claim here was never "measure less." It's narrower: don't let *unmeasured* quietly harden into *unreal*. That inference is the whole trap — and it's one the researchers, to their credit, have now named in their own field.



“Nobody’s inner life was ever changed by a number. What forms a person — as a child, and still now — is what gets noticed and named. The feelings that got neither don’t disappear. They keep working from a layer no one is counting, and they don’t stop because you grew up.”

SANDRA CARACOL

Built4More coach · emotional therapy & conscious parenting

— ONE GOOD QUESTION

**What’s carrying the most weight in
your life right now that nothing
you track can see?**

You don't have to measure it to name it — those are different acts, and naming comes first. The numbers will keep doing

their honest work either way. But from the moment the unmeasured thing has a name, you'll notice it the way you notice the numbers: regularly, and on purpose.

Back to the question above, though — I'd genuinely like to hear your answer. Whatever it is that's doing the carrying and escaping the count. Just hit reply; it comes straight to me, and I read every one.

— WHERE TO FROM HERE

Curious what this looks like for you?

The first conversation is exactly that — a conversation. No pitch, no homework, no framework to memorize. We start where you are and look honestly at what's in the way.

Start a conversation

Four moments we tend to work with. If one of them sounds like where you're standing, that's a good place to begin.

Living Abroad

Leaving Finance

Founders & CEOs

Relocating Partner



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You're reading this because you're curious about growth — that's the only requirement. If it's useful, forward it to someone standing at the edge of a change.

[Unsubscribe](#) anytime; no hard feelings.