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Digital Self Coaching Software and App for Enterprises

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> **"Essentially, Cognician delivers a hyper personalized digital coaching experience, including inspiration, guidance, and follow through to shift behavior throughout your organization at a fraction of the cost of instructor led training, and with greater impact."- Barry Kayton**

CEOCFO: ***Mr. Kayton, what is the concept behind Cognician?***
Mr. Kayton: Essentially, we have taken the essence of coaching and we have turned it into a digital solution. In other words, we have put together a one-to-one interaction between a person and software for a digital coaching experience. That is really the concept.

CEOCFO: ***How did you know in the beginning that you could coach digitally and that it would be effective?***
Mr. Kayton: To be honest, we did not know. We had ten years' experience in instructional design. We were designing educational solutions for universities and companies and the techniques we were using were successful. In one instance, we were working at the University of Cape Town in South Africa and we were running a seminar to help MBA students think creatively about developing new products. Students were coming up to us and saying, "How is it possible that you can get me to think more creative so quickly? I have done extensive workshops on creativity. I have also read five books on creative thinking, but that did not change my thinking. Yet in this one seminar I'm thinking more creatively than ever before. How is that possible?" That was the trigger that got us to ask a simple question. "What if we can do in software what we have been doing in training rooms and seminars for many, many years?" That was back in 2006. We created two prototypes; the first one in 2007 and the second in 2008. It was in 2009 that we started showing those prototypes to clients, and we signed our first client that year. So it was almost three years from the idea to the first client.

CEOCFO: ***How does a typical engagement work?***
Mr. Kayton: We will meet the Chief Learning Officer or the HR officer of the company and sometimes the CEO, to discuss the challenges that the organization is experiencing. For example, the organization may appoint people as leaders; people who have demonstrated exceptional performance in a particular area. However, everyone knows that just being great at a particular job doesn't make you a great manager. And so our clients are seeking new solutions to help new managers develop leadership and coaching competencies. That is the kind of concept that we would discuss. They want to look at their leadership capabilities and they are looking for new, innovative solutions to do that.

Many of our users are millennials and they expect delightful, personalized user experiences on their phones. When we show our clients what we can do in terms of leadership development, they get very excited. That is because interacting with the smartphone in the way that we are able to do through a text based chat is very much in line with millennials' expectations. The software will ask you questions about your work, about the people that you are working with, and it will allow you to reflect on the challenges at work and the goals that you might have. It's all about you, yourself. Of course, it might be a little bit narcissistic at the end of the day, but it gets you to reflect just like a coach does.

The second thing it does is it gets you to express what's weighing on your mind, and perhaps causing you anxiety and stress. For instance, consider conflict management; everybody experiences conflicts in work. What the system does is it will ask you who you are having a conflict with at the moment. You might say, "I am having a conflict with John." Then the system will say, "How would you describe your conflict with John?" You might key in, "John keeps missing deadlines, he has tried to impede me, and he is costing us a fortune." So you have reflected on this conflict with John and you have described what it is from your perspective. The software would then respond, "And how do you think John will describe the conflict?" Therefore, it helps you to think from the other person's perspective, which is a much more mature approach to take. However, we know that users will sometimes take an immature perspective. For instance, you might say, "John complains that I micromanage," and of course that is blaming John. You're not really thinking of the way John experiences the conflict. Therefore, the system is primed and ready to ask you to look at what you wrote and to see whether it aligns with the rule of equity. The rule of equity is what we call a powerful idea. The software introduces it into the conversation, just in time, such as when you are thinking about something important to you, like the conflict with John. Then you are curious about what this thing is, the rule of equity, and the user thinks to herself or himself, "What is the rule of equity, and how does it relate to my conflict with John?" At this point we introduce a bit of content which could be in the form of a video or a couple of paragraphs and because the user is curious and primed they read that new piece of content, which explains the powerful idea; they read about it just when they are ready to absorb the content. Then we ask the users to go back and have a look at what they wrote and maybe re-describe the conflict in a way that aligns with the rule of equity, that is, putting yourself in the other person's shoes. This technique creates a hyper personalized experience.

What I have just described are the first three or four prompts that the software gives when it is helping you to resolve a conflict. However, in that particular context there are probably twenty to thirty different prompts to help you think from different perspectives with the maturity of an experienced and productive leader, so that by the time you have gone through two or three of these conversations with the software you begin to absorb the mental model behind how to resolve a conflict and it becomes the way that you actually deal with conflict in the future, which of course is exactly what you what from any learning engagement. You want to absorb these mental models and make them your own so that they become second nature to you, just like going back to that earlier example of helping MBA students to think creatively. We were able to give the students with powerful, thought provoking, creative questions that they could use to help them build and develop new products. In the context of leadership development, we give the user powerful, thought provoking questions to help them develop as leaders. We do the same in many other contexts.

CEOCFO: ***Are people initially reluctant? Is there trepidation about using the system or does curiosity take over?***
Mr. Kayton: Some people are. For instance, there are two or three questions that sometimes come up. For instance, "Are my responses private to me," or "Who else is going to see what I write?" Our system is being built with privacy in mind. Therefore, everything you write into the system is private and encrypted and secure, with a couple of caveats. One: now and again we might ask the user to share an insight. When they share an insight it is shared amongst their peer group within the organization, not outside the organization. That is one example where your response is not private. It is very clearly delineated within the system whenever you are doing something that is shared. The advantage of these sharing opportunities, which we call insights, is that the user begins to get the feeling that they are part of a group. They can see other people's shared insights in response to the same question. You basically get social learning happening in that context, which is a nice layer on top of the individual coaching experience. Another example of where there is an opportunity for sharing is at the end of the coaching guide where the user can export the entire transcript: all questions and their responses. Then she can send that transcript to someone if she wants to.

However, coming back to your question around how people might be reluctant; one question relates to the privacy concern and another question relates to, "Is this artificial intelligence?" The answer to that is no. This is not artificial intelligence. We have worked with very experienced coaches and we have taken their experiences that have been accumulated over twenty five years or more and distilled from them the most useful questions to ask in particular contexts. The chat is really a script of questions, one question carefully sequenced after another, to give the impression that you are having a conversation with a coach or even a friend. However, it is clearly not artificial intelligence. We make sure that users know that in advance. What we find is that certain users are prolific. For instance, on one of our programs which consisted of one hundred and twenty coaching guides, one of the users did every single one of those coaching guides and the total word count was in excess of eighty thousand words. That is that they wrote more than eighty thousand words in total in response to all of the questions across one hundred and twenty coaching guides. That clearly is an outlier. Most of the time users will write in the region of three hundred to five hundred words per coaching guide, which is an astonishing level of engagement, compared to what you might expect from a commodity eLearning system, where the user is simply clicking through slides laboriously, just to get to the end. With our system the level of engagement is very, very high.

CEOCFO: ***What is it about your approach that instills and lays the foundation so that people do not slip back into their old ways?***

Mr. Kayton: That is a great question! We call that backsliding to comfort zones. We have specifically addressed these during the coaching conversation and anticipate the kind of triggers that will drive people to slide back into some sort of comfort zone. Our model for change is very simple. Change requires at least three things. The first is inspiration. If you are not inspired to change you are just not going to get out of the starting blocks. The second is guidance. The questions that are included in each coaching guide are designed to and change your thinking, because after all thinking is the precursor to behavior change. The intention to change behavior and the commitment to change behavior are the precursors to actually changing the behavior. The questions provide the guidance components. The third component is what we might call follow through, in the same what that a great golfing pro will strike the ball and allow the club to follow through, after striking the ball. In the coaching context, follow through really is about coming back to the commitment after a period of time and asking, "Did I actually do what I committed to do?" For instance, the system will say to you, "You have this conflict with John. What are you going to do in order to resolve the conflict, and when are you going to do this?" You might then say, "I am going to have a meeting with John on Wednesday and I discuss it with him then." At that point the software will say, "Do you want a reminder?" You can choose to have a reminder tomorrow or the next day or a week or two from now." Then on the day of the reminder you will get an email to say, "You committed to a meeting with John to resolve the conflict. Did you do what you committed to do?" Then you can say yes or no. If you say yes it brings you back into the coaching guide to say, "Great! How did it go?" If you say no it also brings you back into the coaching guide and it might say, "How can you set yourself up for success next time?" Therefore, this idea of follow through helps people to meet their own commitments, and it's essential to the behavior change process. It helps people to stop backsliding to past behaviors. Essentially, Cognician delivers a hyper personalized digital coaching experience, including inspiration, guidance, and follow through to shift behavior throughout your organization at a fraction of the cost of instructor led training, and with greater impact.

CEOCFO: ***One of Cognician's three founding principles is to respect the learner. What does that mean? How does that translate in your interactions?***

Mr. Kayton: I think that is key and it really comes down to what I call information centricity versus learner centricity. What do I mean by that? Many instructional designers are required to create some new piece of learning in a rush. A curriculum, if you like, is a body of content that needs to be communicated to the learner. Way too often the learner is regarded as a vessel to be filled with content. The problem with that is that our minds do not work that way. They never have. We are driven by what is important to us, what interests us. Our interests and our values and our goals are the source of our motivation to learn. This is why you can take a child and find that the child is learning way beyond grade level in reading, for instance, if she is interested in reading, if that is her passion. Another child is interested in mathematics and she might be way ahead of grade level in mathematics because she is passionate about it. Therefore, what we do when we create any kind of learning solution is we look for the things that are interesting to people, the things that are valuable to people and we put those interests and values and goals first. We introduce the information as a subordinate piece of content. Therefore, the learner is placed first. The learner is respected as the source of all goodness, of all motivation and the content is subordinated to the learner as the central driving force in the learning situation. If you look at that example of coaching around conflict management we do not start by saying, "Today we are going to learn about conflict management. There are several principals. The first principal is the rule of equity." Who cares about the rule of equity in the abstract? Nobody does! However, you do care about your conflict with John or Susan. If we start with what is important to you we can then introduce powerful ideas to help you resolve issues or meet goals that are important to you. I think that really is the heart of what it means to respect the learner.

CEOCFO: ***How are you reaching out to customers? How do people find you? Do companies understand the difference; the depth of your approach or do they realize the value over time?***

Mr. Kayton: Let me say that I think we launched too early. Back in 2010 when we started out it was very, very difficult for us to explain to our prospects what we were doing. Now and again we would come across someone who deeply understood learning and typically those people became very excited. For instance, we have had people say, "This is what learning should be!" Today there are more and more EdTech solutions being launched sometimes, I must say, by people who are jumping on the bandwagon, rather than really understanding learning in a very deep way. However, there are also some pretty great solutions out there that are tapping into the same core ideas. I think that as learning matures and particularly online learning matures, that more and more organizations are gravitating towards similar kinds of solutions in the sense of the absolute priority to place the learner first.

Nowadays, it is so much easier for us to show clients what we do and for clients to say, "This is exactly what we need." In terms of reaching out to clients, most of our new clients come from referrals. Our business strategy is to form partnerships with organizations, so we have partnerships with global management consultancies of various kinds. Of course they have great relationships with their own customers and want to make sure the customers are using cutting edge solutions. So we are now in the situation where I will wake up every morning and there is a series of emails from our partners wanting to introduce our software to their own clients. Frankly, 99% of our work comes from referrals.

CEOCFO: ***Where do cultural differences come into play?***
Mr. Kayton: This goes back to where we started from. In our early days as instructional designers, back at the turn of the millennium, we were designing material for a multicultural audience. We had to take into account the fact that you could not use idiomatic language, for instance; that you had to be sensitive to cultural perspectives. For example, where we got started in South Africa, an owl is regarded very differently, depending on your cultural background. In some cultures owls are considered as wise. In other cultures owls are considered as evil. Therefore, we have to be very careful of these kinds of things. When it comes to coaching, I think some of the considerations are around the respect for authority. In western cultures there is a more skeptical approach to authority. In some other cultures there is a sort of deeper respect and a reluctance to question authority. In those situations we have to be very careful about what assumptions we make about users.

CEOCFO: ***Why is Cognician an important company?***
Mr. Kayton: I think the work has fundamentally changed. We are now living in "the experience economy." The old commodity eLearning systems were designed, not to provide a great experience for users, but to simply pump information into people. That old approach treats people with a great deal of disrespect. In the modern world we need to create a learning experience that is hyper personalized. To do that we need to start with what is important to the learner, to the person being coached. If we do that the outcome is much more engaged learners and engagement is really what sets one company apart from another. I was looking at a recent statistic that found that companies with high levels of engagement were outperforming their competitors by more that two hundred percent. Therefore, why pay attention to Cognician? Because Cognician can help drive engagement within the workforce, help to mature the leadership pipeline and essentially shift the bottom line.

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