

Interview with Advantara® Institute CEO Hannah S. Wilder, MA, PhD.

Since many people have asked to learn more about how Advantara® came about and what has influenced its creator and the approach of its leader, we've conducted an interview with Hannah so that you can "hear" her in her own words. We've asked people who know her and Advantara© Global Executive Learning and Coach Training Institute to contribute questions. They are the collective Interviewer!

(We've also created a pdf download on FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions on the programs, so if the information you are looking for isn't here, please look there or request it from HSW@Advantara.com by putting "FAQ" in the subject line and your contact information and company name and title in the body of the email)

I = interviewer H – Hannah

I: What do you mean by "global" executive coaching? What is different about this from Executive Coaching in general?

H: I believe that our work as executive coaches and business in general needs to be viewed in a global and cross cultural context. It's been very obvious to me for decades. I've been studying with some of the greats in intercultural work since I was young, and teaching about intercultural counselling and coaching for several decades.

My consciously worldwide and intercultural experiences began at an early age and I also became an "early adaptor" of ideas and practices that might be considered advanced, finding diversity enriching and stimulating. My sense of the world was that it was a big and complex place, and the pace of change was speeding up, especially with the development of electronic media. As I've been consulting and coaching over the years, lived and worked abroad many times and was married to a European and had work and personal experiences with people from various Asian countries. I've had many fine working partnerships and friendships with professional people from all over the world, and worked with many executives with global responsibilities.

Yet until perhaps 2-3 years ago, among those attending the Invitational Executive Coaching Summit, dialoguing at other online and telephone meetings, even among the Executive Coaching Committee (on which I served) at ICF, there was a kind of assumption that what worked in North America and the mindset there could simply be transferred to another location without a change. Some people even said "coaching is

coaching, no matter where you do it." For most of the past 9 years, however, I felt like a voice in the wilderness. Gradually people began to read and hear from coaches in other areas, and one coach even wrote a basic book about it before I got around to doing it, though my book would have been a bit more complex, I think.

Now finally a lot of people are talking about "coaching across cultures" and still have secondary experience or tourist experience ("read a few books, take a trip" was how one coach described it). Even the book written for intercultural coaching gives a broad secondary survey and a few tips. This is useful as a basic introduction to the intercultural part of Global Executive Coaching.

Now, I'm finally going to answer your question! **Being a Global Executive Coach** is much more than mastering a few intercultural tips and tricks, more than a three day training, more than the use of an intercultural assessment. Being a thoroughly skilled Global Executive Coach: having a "big worldview" rather than thinking only about "crossing cultures;" knowing about global and regional economic business systems and organizations; developing the personal and professional traits and skills to be comfortable working with and supporting powerful organizational leaders who are working with very complex systems and schedules, across business functions and their cultures; coaching the leaders of multicultural and geographically dispersed team; knowing how to evaluate and conduct studies on the effectiveness of global executive coaching and return on investment; seeing the world through and so on. I consider Global Executive coaching a completely separate profession because of the fact that we work with individuals, teams, organizations and worldwide systems. It calls on us to develop many of the qualities of our clients, who are truly leaders.

Some people have asked me "*Why is it so important for the upcoming leaders to have a global understanding. What if the company is only local?*"

My answer is that if you are an executive coach, it's almost impossible to limit yourself to only local companies, and even if they appear local, they will very likely have suppliers and clients in other locations in the world. These suppliers, customers and stakeholders are all subject to the effects of different regional and cultural social, political, economic and business regulation systems. I remember living in Charlottesville, Virginia, where I used to meet with a client in a place called The Hardware Restaurant. Some of the food and tableware was imported, the waiters were a African-Americans and young people from East Europe, and the cuisine and clientele were from all over the world because it was a university town. And this was supposedly a local restaurant. So they were all part of a global system or systems and therefore subject to influence on a global perspective.

The phrase that I like to use is "there is no 'over there' anymore, and although we all live locally, there are global influences on everything we do, whether or not we are conscious of it. Put this into the context of coaching executives and it's true many times over. Companies that do well expand way beyond the boundaries of the country in which they were founded, and in order to do this, a certain global consciousness and behaviour has to precede this on the part of their leaders. Global

executive coaches are the people who can support them best in leading and growing their businesses and other organizations.

It's not just about crossing cultures; it's about being able to lead and coach in a complex, rapidly changing environment with interacting global systems. To lead that kind of change we need a certain kind of person and a certain type of coach who is highly trained and also has the kind of dominant thinking styles to conceive strategies and carry them out, to recognize and take advantage of opportunities, and to handle any challenges or problems in a way that is not just decisive but take into account all factors that are important. This must be done in a way that includes the lessons of the past, recognizes and factors in everything in the present, and does so in such a way that the implications for the future are considered.

A prime example is the fact that there is currently a world food shortage due to high prices and scarcity, partly because certain policies have developed (probably too late to make a big difference where it's intended to) to divert agricultural crops toward bio fuels. Anyone with a "big picture" mind and thinking could look at this situation and see that it was going to result in severe food shortages and subsequent human suffering leading to unrest and political problems. It's just exacerbated the world economic crisis, adding one more layer of chaos. The coaches I train know how to spot long term effects like this. They ask the right questions to expand the thinking of their clients so that they minimize major mistakes and take advantage of opportunities for human and business development worldwide.

I: What started your interest in the whole subject of global and intercultural leadership?

When I was growing up in the Eastern United States, I moved a lot and was always having to adjust to new micro-cultures, schools, social groups. There were people of different racial and economic backgrounds, and considerable variety in speech, local custom, and so on. Most important, I experienced a number of different environments to which I had to adjust in order to fit in. At the same time, I had to be me and to relate to new environments one after the other.

I had always read about other cultures and when I was 18 years old I had already studied Russian for a year. I enrolled in a scholarship program to study intensive Russian and went to Moscow during the cold war. I wasn't particularly leftist, but I was curious about other kinds of people. In the program sponsored by Indiana University, we had to promise to speak only Russian or we'd be sent home! This kind of immersion-study-with-a- consequence included a lot of information on culture, literature, some politics, and so on.

One evening I ended up with a friend in Red Square in a conversation with some Russians. They were asking me a lot of questions in Russian that indicated the differences in our systems and cultures. I enjoyed having to think on my feet and look at things from their perspective, using their words. At one point I looked up and there were about 300 people gathered around us, listening! This was in 1961 and most of these people had never met an American before. Far from acting like "enemies" which is what the governments told us they were supposed to

be, they were friendly and curious, even if more direct and a little confrontational than I expected (Americans have an orientation of being "nice" but often you don't know what they are thinking). This experience inspired me and I began to travel all over Europe and meet people from other Eastern European countries (now called "new Europe") and then the Middle East, Latin America, Asia, Africa and so on. This inclined me to focus my studies in interdisciplinary, global and intercultural matters. I see us all as rooted in our own cultures (mine being primarily British-American) but being global citizens. In this sense, some of us have been mentally global for a long time!

At the same time I was always interested in sociology and political science (I got my MA at Harvard in an interdisciplinary program that included these and anthropology, history, and so on, and my PhD program at MIT was similar but more applied and less tied to traditional education). I also strained at the confines of gender roles in the United States so I was among the first people to develop Women's Studies Curricula and Programs. I began teaching at an innovative institution of higher education in the US. At the first graduation there was a reporter who went back to the office and wrote: "some of the faculty wore academic gowns and some wore suits." I had to write a letter to the editor saying: "I guess you didn't notice the ones who were wearing dresses, did you?" In other words, take off those blinders!

So, through both my personal life (I married a European) and my academic, and later governmental and NGO experience, I was always viewing things from an eagle's perspective: seeing everything from high up and also with a real focus on specifics. I was always asking myself "What does this mean?" at many levels. I loved and still love the real stories about people's lives and how they unfold. I like being able to support people in creating the life story they want to look back on. When this is an influential person, it means that their choices are affecting the lives of many people, so it's important that they are well considered and their follow through well strategized and carried out.

I'm also very interested in the brain and how different people learn differently (or in similar ways as well). One of my passions is using the right questions to create new ways of thinking, actual new neural pathways for more open minded and creative thinking. I enjoy watching people make choices and observing effectiveness, wanting to widen sense of possibility and creativity for better environment. So for me it's again about the big picture, not just one individual or team's work, but how it has an impact on many stakeholders and even in creating the future business environment.

As for executive and leadership studies, I've known and been comfortable with some very powerful people and always found it interesting to study their methods of influence and the power relationships between them. The right use of power and influence is an is a very important aspect of executive leadership, whether in business, government, or in a non-governmental organization. As an adolescent I was always watching political conventions and enjoyed it when leaders made it into a real contest with real issues. But I also saw a lot of "power games" on a national level, in institutions (even in school) and in families. Later I studied the work of Harold G. Lasswell on power and with some very bright professors in my PhD program, which focussed on political leadership and communications at MIT.

I: What professional experiences were most formative in developing your ideas and philosophy?

Generally, I would say:

- working internationally with media leaders
- coaching and consulting globally
- academic research and teaching adults
- being a clinical professional counsellor
- being an executive myself
- coaching executives and teams from over 50 countries in all areas of business and organizational functioning
- teaching coaching skills to executives in geographically dispersed learning teams across business functions over a period of years (worth an MBA and another PhD combined!)
- designing a curriculum for and training high level global executive coaches through Advantara® Institute (I've been fortunate to attract some really bright and experienced people)

I: What about other personal influences?

My natural brain dominance.

When I moved a lot as a child and travelled and worked in different countries as an adult (which I'm still doing) it was easy and natural for me to adjust because I was observant, bright, hopeful, and curious. I also have a dominant thinking style which is very "big picture"-oriented, imaginative, quick, solution-oriented, with a quirky sense of humour (in Katherine Benziger's work this is called a Frontal right) and also having had to develop (because of an interesting and sometimes challenging family life) the area of the brain that deals with teamwork, harmony, spirituality, connection and coordination. This is called the basal right. I'm advancing the area that deals with science and strategy. The thing I really don't like is repetitive, monitoring tasks and behaviour. I like to design systems but I prefer to train other people who are better at basal left activity to carry out the monitoring. Interestingly, I find that most of the people who go through Advantara® as coach trainees are also either Frontal Rights with highly developed Basal Right, or the opposite.

My family and ancestry was also very influential.

Aside from genetics, I come from a diverse British heritage: English, Scots- Irish, Norman, and Catalan. I still feel very close to this heritage, now have re-emigrated to the United Kingdom and have a partner who is British. I feel I'm at home, although I value my American heritage of pioneering spirit, independence and openness to diversity. One of my ancestors signed the Declaration of Independence and others were involved in abolition and the Underground Railway. Later others lost their lives in World War Two defending Britain. I feel good about this. They stood up for what was right. They didn't let people with limited and damaging views and actions get them down or win. They did their part.

My family travelled from France to England to New England, then became Quakers after they had a run in with the Puritan hierarchy in Massachusetts. One of them, William Macy, a Baptist, sheltered some Quakers in a rainstorm for 45 minutes in the 1600s. The Quakers were later hung (a common occurrence in Puritan New England) and Macy was summoned to appear in Massachusetts General Court and pay a fine of £5

sterling, a large sum in those days. He paid the fine but said he was sick and didn't have a horse; however, two weeks later in October he had organized a group of people to move to the island of Nantucket which was under the jurisdiction of New York. I understand that these first white settlers got along well with the native Americans who lived there, but didn't allow any Puritan ministers to set foot on the island! (Unfortunately, the native Americans fell prey to European diseases a number of years later when larger numbers of Europeans came, so they're not around to tell their side of the story.)

Another ancestor, Samuel Shattuck, was put on a boat and sent back to England because he defended a fellow Quaker against some of the Puritan bullies. He was very resourceful, and went to the West Indies where he got another Quaker, a ship owner, to take him back to England where he went to Charles II and told him how Quakers were being persecuted and killed. The King deputized him and sent him back with orders to the governor to stop the persecution of Quakers. It didn't happen immediately, but it was the beginning of the end of it. Later my ancestors were involved in founding the New Garden Friends Meeting near Guilford, NC. This community is known for founding Guilford College and also for strong abolitionism and pacifism. Levi Coffin, the white man who was most involved in the Underground Railroad, helping slaves to freedom, came from this community. So there has been a strong tradition of travelling and also of leadership in my family. They gave me a genetic heritage of faith in the possibility and power of change.

Mindfulness Practice

I've also been very influenced by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh and studied mindfulness practice with him as a lay member of the Order of Interbeing (a worldwide mindfulness community of practice) for ten years. I still follow this practice and teach it in plain language to my students and sometimes to my clients because it is very good for mental clarity and stability of spirit, both of which are very important for global leaders and their coaches.

I have learned much from and have great respect for His Holiness the Dalai Lama and will be spending five days with him in May. This has long been a dream of mine.

I also studied with Natalie Goldberg, a well known Zen writing teacher and practitioner. She saw me clearly and supported who I was. She believed I could write but was surprised at how I developed.

Drama and Improvisation

I'm also a poet and screenplay writer and a trained actor and director. This is all very helpful as a coach and coach trainer because it involves use of self. I've studied improvisation with the acting coach Sheri Mann in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I use this in training coaches. Use of self is a very important aspect of coach development. I sometimes do speech coaching for actors in American dialect.

I: Who are the other most important influences in your thinking?

Constance Smith and Susan Story Lyman (both Deans of the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University), writers Tillie Olsen and Lee Smith, people of colour who stand up against the oppression of their people, women who stand up against gender stereotyping. These are all leaders.

I would like to see more of the enfranchised groups doing that on behalf of others. I would like to see less avarice and more inclusiveness, in order to create a “win win” world. It works better.

Non-violent communication by Marshal Rosenberg

Appreciative Inquiry by David Cooperider

Questioning to open the mind...Marilee Goldberg Adams

Cynder Niemela on High Impact Teaming™

Katherine Benziger on natural brain dominance and its impact on work life and health.

I: Where do you see yourself fitting into the world of coaching and what are your contributions up to this time?

I’m easily bored, so I’m always going ahead and looking for the next horizon, and I’m also concerned about standards of practice and knowledge base of coaching based executive development. I’ve been licensed and certified and examined and assessed so much that I realize that that is needed for some people to understand high levels of work, but it isn’t everything. It’s a mistake to get too attached to that as evidence of excellence and advanced thinking because when you think of it, if it’s already a certification then it’s accepted and by definition is no longer cutting edge. I developed the first certification program in Global Executive Coaching, which includes all the important areas on which one needs to be a leader in the field. Now, I’m looking at some other areas for programs to take people to the next step.

Complex thinking

Intercultural global leadership

Interdependence

High Awareness© Coaching and leadership

PresencePlus© Leadership and Coaching

Humor and enjoyment

- these are some of my contributions, but I’ve done this rather quietly and early on. I’m a kind of a quirky sage by now, albeit an enthusiastic one.

I: What legacy would you like to leave to the field of executive learning?

Comprehensive and complex (realistic) thinking , diversity based approach Body of Knowledge, a group of people who are extremely well trained and will be leaders in the field of coaching, who will define it.

I: Hannah, you’d been in this field longer than most people still active and yet you seem contemporary with much younger people. How do you account for this?

I feel I’m very curious and hopeful, traits of the young, yet I have decades of experience. I enjoy newness and questioning the accepted. I have a very broad and high view of things, a self-renewing way of living, I love creativity and invention, really enjoy people and their

stories, am very accepting but still strong minded and keep challenging myself and those around me in a positive way. We cannot afford to be complacent. The world isn't doing that well, and I believe it's because many of our leader are too small minded and limited in their thinking in various ways. They need to wake up to reality, which is complex, and they need to see many more possibilities than they have in the past.

I: Do you ever plan to retire?

It depends on what you mean. I plan to change orientation, to do more creative writing and music making, but I hope I'll always continue to contribute in special events and supporting people in my organization and profession. First, I have to find the means to do it. During the whole time I was training to become a coach, I was very ill with what was eventually diagnosed (by me with the help of a lovely doctor in Santa Monica, California) as a genetic kidney disorder which meant that I couldn't get restorative sleep and I couldn't manufacture energy. I discovered this man and took his advice and got my life back, just when I had gotten to the point where I couldn't summon the energy to get up out of a chair! I didn't despair; I got cracking, and asked for understanding and to find a plan to get myself better. I asked with my whole heart. And within a week I found the answer and the solution. Within three months, after being sick for four and a half years, I got my life back! Maybe I'm too ornery to retire, but I'd like to work a bit less and spend more time writing surprising screen plays and fiction based on real lives.

I'm looking for people to join me, and take over some of the work we re doing so that I can step back and do some more innovation and enjoy my new life here with my partner. He's "retired" but has some passionate interests himself that keep him stimulated and he contributes to the community.

I; What's next for you?

I'll be coming out with a couple of books, sharing knowledge and thinking in a variety of media formats. I'm creating some new programs. I'm inviting new executive clients and colleagues to co-create programs with me that are needed in these challenging times. I have heard people say "We can't change the world." I think we won't survive unless we do. We certainly won't thrive. And as long as people are suffering needlessly, business isn't doing its collective job. Business is here for people, not the other way around. The world's population isn't here to support the fortunes of a few. We're all here to prosper together, and I know that's possible. I also know that a lot of business leaders feel the same way.

I: What kind of clients are attracted to working with you and your trainees?

I'm thinking of two very special clients that I have right now. Both of them are frontal right thinkers: big picture, creative, ambitious and wanting to make a difference. One is in the automotive industry in charge of a number of factories in Europe, the other an architect involved in some significant projects around the world. Both want to expand their comfort zones, leave their limitations of thinking and action, balance their lives, contribute to developing other people in their work and social lives. Both are athletic and both are interested in using their minds to

change their own lives and the work and lives of those around them. Both are very interested in developing a team spirit and in seeing the best in others, using strengths to lead. Both of them are self reflective and take responsibility for their own lives, including any mistakes or overlooked opportunities. Both want to become more visible and step into the fullness of their leadership capabilities. In some ways each of them sees himself as the creator of his own work of art: his life. They're different in that one has known a kind of acceptance and has a good family life. The other has had quite a lot of personal challenges to overcome internally and realizes the value of friendship. He's looking to create his personal life more fully. Both are ambitious in a very positive way, not just for themselves but for people around them and really, for a better world, each contributing from his own sphere. I also have some extraordinary people who are training with me to be coaches and faculty members, people who live all over the world and are wives and mothers yet leaders in their professions. They combine nobility and grace with ambition and wanting the best for themselves and those around them. They don't want anything to stand in their way, certainly not artificial limitations. They're also fun to be with and very trustworthy.

I: If you look at the last three years, how has Advantara® developed?

We grew out of the first attempt to create a global network of coaches. I led that group, which looked at the challenges that business leaders and other organizational leaders were facing globally. I then realized that everyone would need to be much more knowledgeable and skilful than previously thought in order to be resilient and thrive in the coming years.

So I sat down and created a program that would help them grow as humans, and to develop the skills and professionalism that would be needed. I probably could have been more financially ambitious but I've always believed in doing what I felt was right, where my heart led me. Others have been more strategic in their segmenting and branding themselves in specific labelling. I'm not satisfied with a limited and easily understandable segmented presentation. I don't think it takes us very far. We don't have a lot of time to get ourselves together as human beings.

Others have copied the idea, but I don't see them having the same kind of vision for a better world, the kind of passion and high standards that Advantara® people have. I'm very pleased to have attracted people like this, and I'd be pleased to have even more of them, and to spread a viral infection of this spirit throughout the coaching world and business leadership world.

I: What's the next phase for Advantara® Institute?

At the moment we're expanding our ideas of what's possible and creating a broader foundation worldwide. That foundation isn't an easy association of people with a brief training, and it isn't following me as some kind of charismatic leader. Rather, it's people coming together for a purpose, the same purpose that the two clients I described have.

Sorry, this is all a bit wordy. It's not easy. It's very challenging to look the suffering and chaos of the world in the eye and say, "We don't believe you can keep your hold on humanity and business. We're going to get a handle on all of this and pull it together. " I think it was Margaret

Mead who said *"Never doubt that a small group of dedicated people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*

That's the ultimate statement in the possibility of us all taking responsibility for improving our lives and businesses and the quality of life we all share. We cannot pretend that how we live doesn't affect everyone. We are all interdependent and everything we do has an effect. Also, in terms of practices, we're all practicing something. Some people are practicing greed and hostility and divisiveness (and unfortunately some of them are religious leaders) while others are practicing positive possibility and responsibility, new ways of thinking to meet challenges and create opportunities.

In each moment, we need to observe what we are practicing and make conscious choices about what we are going to practice next. It's not good to say "I'm this.." or "I'm not that.." The thing is to look at how we might expand, grow, be more, even if it's more tolerant and accepting of difference. That's huge. We no longer need to define ourselves by being not "the other" or by fighting against what we hold onto as a self definition. The tragedy is the person or leader who says "We're good and they are bad and we're going to fight them because they aren't like us." It's just stupid (although it does sell weapons and make some people rich) because it leads to large scale death and destruction. Instead, we need to accept ourselves as works in progress, see how we can put our best together, let go of what isn't working, and not only do what John Lennon said "Imagine" but start taking action to bring our positive imaginations into reality.

Part of this is "re-membering" ourselves and what works. We do know it. We have to shake out the dust and confusion and see the stars. Cutting through ignorance and confusion and delusion and sorting ourselves out so that we can put things right between ourselves is what's called for to save our businesses and thrive. We cannot afford to let ourselves be hijacked by confusion or delusion any longer. We have to wake up and create the world we want. That's why Advantara® has the idea "We come when called, to support you in going forward." We ourselves are leaders and it's why we work well with business leaders.

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