



COACHING FOR  
**EMPOWERMENT**  
AT THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE ADMINISTRATION

# The International Trade Administration

**Any organization with a global workforce of nearly 2,000 employees faces daunting challenges maintaining motivation and productivity. For the International Trade Administration (ITA), these challenges are magnified. Employees are spread over more than 70 countries. Staff development and retention are constant priorities. New and innovative approaches are needed.**

To meet these challenges and more, ITA adopted what today is viewed as a visionary approach. The organization established a Human Capital Talent Management Division and redoubled its commitment to enhanced talent management and optimization. Central to this innovative initiative was the creation of an internal coaching program.

ITA was ahead of the curve among federal agencies in its proactive approach to coaching. The organization started developing its coaching program in 2016, more than a year before other federal coaching initiatives began. By the time a 2017 Executive Order was issued requiring federal agencies to reduce costs while working to maximize employee performance, ITA's internal coaching program was well underway.

Initially launched on a pilot basis, the ITA coaching program expanded rapidly such that today, coaching is available for any US-based employee. ITA continues to work toward its vision of making coaching available to all global staff. By 2019, the ongoing effort and underlying adoption of a coaching culture earned the

ITA coaching program the United States Department of Commerce's second highest achievement, the Secretarial Silver Medal Award, acknowledging the program's organizational impact.

"This coaching program changed my life on all fronts within six months," said an employee commenting on the value of the effort.

In recognition of the agency's sustained commitment to coaching, ITA earned the [International Coaching Federation's \(ICF\)](https://www.coachingfederation.org/prism-award/) top honor for organizations with strong coaching cultures: the 2020 International Prism Award. ICF's Prism Award program honors organizations that have achieved the highest standard of excellence in coaching programs that yield discernible and measurable positive impacts, meet rigorous professional standards, achieve key strategic goals, and shape organizational culture (Learn more at [coachingfederation.org/prism-award.](https://www.coachingfederation.org/prism-award/))

## A Sustainable Coaching Program

Before the internal coaching program began, ITA outsourced limited coaching services only for executives and senior leaders. As such, external coaches whose focus was previously on private-sector organizations and companies faced a challenge of adapting to the day-to-day realities of a global federal government agency. To ensure the greatest value could be derived from coaching, ITA sought to align its coaching activities with four key internal

principles—impact, sustainability, scalability, and efficiency.

These principles are driving forces for learning and development initiatives at ITA.

“Our overall goal with this coaching concept is to create a stronger, healthier organization by fostering a coaching culture and fully engaging and optimizing our staff as part of a broader strategic workforce optimization program called the Talent Reserve Force,” said Brian McNamara, former Chief Learning Officer at the International Trade Administration, who conceptualized and led the program’s successful creation.

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*ITA Employee*

ITA went from spending upwards of \$200,000 annually on external coaches to nearly half as much by placing a greater emphasis on developing internal coaches and partnering with other federal agencies. What started in 2017 with only a few coaches has expanded to 30 internal volunteer coaches who have received at least 100 hours of ICF-accredited training and who have provided more than 2,100 coaching hours to hundreds of employees. Since its inception, ITA’s internal coaching investment has saved the agency nearly \$550,000 over external coaching fees.

“It’s been a grassroots effort that now has become widely accepted,” noted Todd Hiser, Senior International Trade Specialist and Co-Lead of the coaching program with fellow Senior International Trade Specialist, Iris Kapo. “More than half of the organization now knows what coaching is and understands some of the techniques,” Hiser continued. “Now it is actually integral to ITA as a whole.”

## A Rigorous Application Process for Coaches

ITA has an extensive selection and training process for its internal coaches. This contributes greatly to the program’s quality and impact. The multi-layer evaluation process includes:

**Application:** Team members interested in becoming coaches must agree to a coach training and service commitment, must detail why they are interested, what traits would make them effective, how being a coach contributes to their own career goals, and how they would use coaching skills to contribute to the organization. Each candidate’s supervisor must complete an agreement and evaluation form as part of the application and approval process.

**Review Panel:** Eligible candidates’ applications are then evaluated by a review panel of ITA coaches. This evaluation provides the supervisor’s perspective on the candidate’s ability to build trust, maintain confidentiality, demonstrate emotional intelligence, as well as a view of their natural ability to coach and develop others. Each candidate’s application package is scored using a set of evaluation criteria, which determines which candidates will be interviewed.

**Interview:** Following the application package review, candidates are invited for an interview where their responses to a standard set of questions are evaluated, scored, and averaged by a panel of coaches. These scores, combined with application scores, are used to rank the order of the candidates since demand is larger than the available training spots.

**Training:** Once selected, new coaches must complete a minimum of 100 hours of ICF-accredited coach training. ITA pairs each new coach with a more experienced internal coach to assist them with onboarding, mentoring, and initial coaching

engagements. Once onboarding is complete, new coaches have numerous opportunities to continue developing their coaching skills, including bi-weekly cadre calls, online learning, webinars, guest speakers, and workshops.

### A Return on Investment for ITA

Integral to the program's success is a robust framework of metrics and evaluation that captures both qualitative and quantitative impact. Since its inception, the ITA coaching program achieved a 225% ROI on training dollars invested. Of those who received coaching, over 96% said the experience was valuable, helped them accomplish at least one goal, and was something they would recommend to colleagues.

For ITA, quality matters just as much as quantity. For this reason, those receiving coaching are asked to complete pre- and post-coaching surveys to measure the program's impact. Responses reveal some of the greatest benefits these coachees realized, including: feeling heard, improved clarity with personal and professional goals, increased confidence and self-esteem, and having an accountability partner. As a testament to the quality and rigor of the program, over 98% of coachees would recommend the program to others and 97% would recommend his/her coach to others.

This effort has also been a tremendous motivator for the coaches in the cadre who were already top performers but were rejuvenated by such a meaningful way to contribute to the organization, which has led to being able to retain these leaders.

"For many of our coaches, including myself, being part of this program has increased our commitment and drive to supporting ITA's mission and people," noted Kapo.

"In the 20 years I've been a part of this organization, this program is by far the most visionary and impactful of which I have been a part," said one long-time ITA employee.

### Looking Forward: Coaching Specializations and Global Reach

The coaching program at ITA continues to evolve and expand, reaching more people across the organization. ITA coaches now can receive additional training opportunities through assessment certifications and credentialing. Employees also have access to workshops and team building initiatives to bring the language of coaching throughout the agency. Coaching is being used in a variety of ways to support strategic talent management and change management initiatives and leadership development.

**"The vision was always a multi-prong approach where you were able to integrate coaching into other strategic learning and organizational change initiatives."**

*Brian McNamara  
Former Chief Learning Officer at ITA*

"The vision was always a multi-prong approach where you were able to integrate coaching into other strategic learning and organizational change initiatives," said McNamara. "We're reinvesting in our coaches as they continue to invest their talents in our organization."

ITA expanded its coaching program for international staff at the end of 2020 to meet the needs of the agency's global workforce. A pilot program will help approximately 100 ITA employees in embassies throughout the Middle East and Africa to address the unique challenges they face while abroad, as well as the needs of locally employed staff.

“The ultimate goal is to help the rest of the U.S. Department of Commerce, and other departments outside of Commerce,” said Hiser.

ITA is working with other agencies and departments in the U.S. government to support them in bringing coaching programs to their employees, further expanding the program’s vision that anyone that wants a professionally trained coach will have access to one.

With an ever-growing community of internal coaches, ITA’s coaching initiative is fully integrated into its professional development structure and organizational culture. By 2021, coaching skills workshops will be provided to over 90% of US-based leadership and over 80% of US-based field staff, with expansion into global offices enabled through a new international pilot program. Due to this effort, a Coaching Affinity Group has also been launched to keep employees engaged by offering them a consistent opportunity to be in community, expand their learning, and practice their skills.

“This informal group is part of creating a long lasting coaching culture because it fosters greater exposure of the coaching spirit across the organization and provides another framework to keep the conversation, ideas and enthusiasm going,” said Kapo.

From the U.S. to Kenya, and around the world, every ITA employee will soon have access to use coaching to unlock their potential and realize the value of the visionary approach ITA adopted nearly half a decade ago. 🙌

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The International Coaching Federation (ICF) is the world’s largest organization leading the global advancement of the coaching profession and fostering coaching’s role as an integral part of society. Founded in 1995, its 35,000+ members located in more than 140 countries and territories work toward common goals of enhancing awareness of coaching and upholding the integrity of the profession through lifelong learning and upholding the highest ethical standards. Through the work of its six unique family organizations, ICF empowers professional coaches, coaching clients, organizations, communities and the world through coaching. Visit [coachingfederation.org](https://www.coachingfederation.org) to learn more.

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