

Critical Path Launches Fractional COO Practice as Triangle Ranks 4th for Small Business Growth

Brett Coakley brings operations leadership from Google, Fitbit, NuVasive, and Blue Apron to Triangle companies not ready for a full-time COO.

RALEIGH, NC, UNITED STATES, August 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Raleigh-Cary metro ranked fourth in the nation for small business performance this spring, according to a CoworkingCafe study released in May. Small firms now account for 47 percent of total employment across the Triangle and drove close to 90 percent of the region's net new job growth over the past year.



Brett Coakley, founder of Critical Path Executive Coaching and Fractional Leadership, LLC, based in Raleigh, N.C.

That growth creates a problem most founders only recognize once they are inside it. Companies scale past the point where the founder can hold the whole business in their head, and the informal habits that worked at fifteen people begin to fail somewhere around forty. Decisions queue up. Projects slip without a clear cause. Hiring a full-time Chief Operating Officer would address it, but a COO in this market costs more than most companies at that stage can justify.

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*Brett Coakley, Founder,
Critical Path*

[Critical Path Executive Coaching and Fractional Leadership, LLC](#) launched this month to work on that gap. The Raleigh firm places [fractional Chief Operating Officers and Chiefs of Staff](#) inside founder-led companies, takes on operations

and program management work for teams that need less than a full executive, and coaches individual leaders.

"For twenty years I was the person brought in when there was no template," said Brett Coakley, founder of Critical Path. "New product, new region, new process, no precedent. You find the path while you're still figuring out where the walls are. What I see across the Triangle is founders doing that alone. The way decisions got made when everyone sat in one room stops working, and nobody notices right away. What they notice is that everything takes longer and no one can say why."

For organizations, that can mean a fractional COO or Chief of Staff working alongside the founder a set number of days each month, or lighter operations support for a team that mainly needs an operating rhythm and someone to keep programs moving. The firm also takes defined projects: standing up a PMO, running a transformation, or repairing an operation that outgrew the way it was first built. For leaders, it offers [executive coaching](#) for people growing in the role they hold now, and career direction and positioning for anyone in transition.

Engagements begin with a scoped diagnostic, a structured look at how the business actually runs, before any ongoing commitment. Most continue as a fractional retainer or a defined project.

Coakley spent his early career in hardware program management at Motorola Mobility, Google, and Fitbit, then moved into regulated medical device operations at NuVasive and transformation leadership at Blue Apron, a public company. At NuVasive he built the program management function from nothing, covering four business units and more than 400 components under FDA regulation. At Blue Apron he rebuilt how the executive team made decisions, cutting deferred decisions by 35 percent and returning roughly 40 hours a month to leadership while governing a \$10 million initiative portfolio.

As a coach, Coakley has worked with hundreds of leaders over the course of his career, from senior individual contributors and directors up through vice presidents and the C-suite, across technology, SaaS, fintech, biotech, medtech, aerospace, and manufacturing, helping them clear roadblocks and find the next step on their own critical path.

He holds PMP, Certified ScrumMaster, Certified Scrum Product Owner, and Six Sigma Green Belt certifications, will complete an Executive MBA at UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School in October 2026, and holds a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

About Critical Path

Critical Path Executive Coaching and Fractional Leadership, LLC is a Raleigh, North Carolina practice founded by Brett Coakley. For organizations, the firm provides fractional Chief Operating Officer, Chief of Staff, program management, and operations support, along with project-based engagements including PMO buildouts, transformation programs, and operational turnarounds, serving small and mid-sized businesses and founder-led companies across the Research Triangle. For leaders, it provides executive coaching for those in role and career positioning for

those in transition. Learn more at criticalpathhq.com.

Brett Coakley

Critical Path Executive Coaching and Fractional Leadership

+1 919-867-7284

brett@criticalpathhq.com

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