

Coaching from the inside out:

Creating Exceptional Results

What is coaching?

Coaching is the fastest growing process today for making successful people more successful. A colleague of mine once said, "Coaching is about shifting from survival of the fittest to development of the fittest". It is a guided relationship process established with a team member in which both parties are accountable. The coaching process is forward looking, change oriented, and developmental. It is also a tool enabling higher team member and client satisfaction, productivity, revenue growth, and stakeholder value.

It is not therapy, counseling, or giving advice. It is also not technique oriented or rescuing behavior.

What are the characteristics of an effective coach?

Coaching is more about being than doing. It is more about essence than role. It comes from being authentic and congruent. The inner reality and the outer reality of the coach are not at odds with one another. Who the coach is and what the coach does are consistent.

The process of coaching begins in the character of the person and moves outward to enrich others. It goes beyond competency and skill building to character and personal development.

Effective coaches I have observed also have a psychological maturity born out of a servant leadership. The value and contribution of coaching is achieved through service not control. At the core of service is interdependence and reciprocity. The coaching process appears to work best when there are mutual benefits and the process is based on a relationship involving trust, support, and shared values.

Finally the coach has a non-anxious presence creating an environment that is safe for both parties.

What do effective coaches do?

The coach's main role deals with expanding the ability to see contexts, rather than supplying content. The coaching process affirms the person, seeks to clarify choices and acts as a catalyst for action in achieving individual and organizational purposes. The coaching task involves connecting the inner person (confidence,



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values, purpose) and the outer person (reaching targets, achieving goals). It's important to accept that what is happening in one domain of our lives will often be reflected in others. Much of what is known as coaching today focuses on the outer person, thereby limiting the coaching process in effecting longer-term results.

What are some current impediments to coaching?

For many years, managers have received positive feedback for having the answers and giving advice. For managers who have

been trained to have the answers, point out weaknesses, and solve problems, coaching is often an unnatural act. Coaching is the opposite of judging and the need to control. A coaching relationship helps people work out issues and find their own answers through the skillful use of listening and probing questions.

Furthermore, effective coaches are not motivated by a need to be approved, stroked, rewarded, nor a need to perform or judge. They understand situations from a perspective that is not driven by ego and see situations AS THEY ARE, instead of viewing them through the mirror of their own emotions or mental models of how things ought to be.

How Do I Become an Effective Coach?

1) Create a safe context

People tend to respond to us within the context we create. It is useful when you are prepared to coach and the team member is open to coaching. The things you say and do to set the stage are important here. First, let the person know that the purpose of the coaching relationship is to support his or her overall development and effectiveness. If you are only willing to coach someone to be more effective in his or her current position, make that clear. If you are willing to explore opportunities outside of those boundaries, state that as well.

2) Really Listen

Hear the words and read the emotional content. Make eye contact and demonstrate receptive body language (e.g. keep your legs and arms uncrossed). One of the most


powerful ways to be of value to our team members and to be influential is to be fully with them in the moment – to pay full attention to them. It is a wonderful gift to have someone give you his or her full attention. It can also be helpful to have someone reflect back to you what he or she heard and felt while listening to you. When the feelings are noticed and reflected back, we have a greater awareness of ourselves.

By fully listening to team members without interrupting or problem solving, you set the stage that allows them to find their own answers. Your interruptions, no matter how well intentioned, take the floor away from a team member and put the focus back on you. When you are certain that the team member has completed his or her thought, then reflect back what you heard and observed.

3) Ask probing and open-ended questions

The goal is to explore opportunities, brainstorm, and assist the team members to challenge themselves. The key is to explore and facilitate not to tell or direct. A manager might say, “Here’s what you need to do.” A coach says, “Let me ask you some questions that might assist in getting an alternative view ... one that may reveal some additional options.” Questions like “Would you tell me more?” “How is that so important to you?” and “What would that look like?” are often part of helping you and the team member to focus. Also use behaviorally based questions instead of hypothetical questions. (“tell me a time when you” ... rather than “what would you do if”).

The key to this process of asking questions is that you must be genuinely curious and not make the team member feel as though he or she is being judged, interrogated, or manipulated. When



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your questions respect the team member’s thought process, you support his or her own questioning of long held assumptions.

4) Keep the monkey off your back

“It is not about me”. The issues presented by the coaches belong to him/her. Adopting the issue for you by giving advice or solving the problem does not allow for development and increases resistance to change. Consciously do not give team members the answers to problems, ask questions, explore options, and facilitate the discovery of choices and possibilities. The goal is for the team member to find the answer that works best for him or her. Remember our answers work for us.

5) Give and receive useful feedback

When you give feedback that is goal oriented and focuses on future possibilities – it empowers and creates intention. Your immediate specific and focused feedback enables the development of an action plan. It is also important to focus on behaviors not personalities. By doing so you create openness to feedback and reduce resistance. As coach, also be prepared to receive feedback. Generally we are more effective if we are open to feedback – asking for it creates a more trusting and receptive climate. When it is given listen to it carefully, asking for specific examples. This will enable you to develop an action plan. Finally, check to ensure that you have understood the feedback correctly, thank the person for the feedback, and follow through by acting on the feedback.

6) Develop an action plan and follow up

The goal is to have an accountability agreement with specific action steps to continue certain behaviors and use new ones.

You rehearse the future possibilities and plans, create agreement on the realism of the plans, and outline how to celebrate the achievement of outcomes.

Finally, follow up is intended to assist team members in staying on course with their plans.

Hudson, F. M. (1999, p.32) suggests asking four questions:

What is working in your plan?

What isn’t working in your plan?

What new conditions suggest changes in your plan?

What do you want to accomplish from this brief coaching contact?

Suggested Reading:

Argyris, C.: *Knowledge for Action*.
San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Gilley, J., and Boughton, N.: *Stop Managing, Start Coaching*.
New York, N.Y., McGraw-Hill, 1996.

Hendricks, W.: (ed). *Coaching, Mentoring and Managing*.
New York: Career Press, 1996.

Hudson, F.M. *The Handbook of Coaching*.
San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Kinlaw, D.: *Coaching for Commitment*.
2nd edition, San Francisco, Calif., Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Landsberg, M.: *The Tao of Coaching*.
Santa Monica, Calif., Knowledge Exchange, 1997.

Whyte, D. *The Heart Aroused*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.

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