

What is Coaching?

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"In today's environment of changing technology and evolving organizations, coaching can have a strategic impact... Coaching is an investment that you make in developing your key resource - people - for the long-term benefit of your organization." - Harvard College

Coaching as a Change Initiative

The history of change initiatives is long: Designed change is an ever-present focus of management. However, the success rate is less than impressive. Peter Senge (The Dance of Change) estimates that 80% of change initiatives fail to accomplish their intended goals. Designed change programs are effective only 20% of the time and even in those successes, change efficacy is due largely to unintended effects or the Hawthorne Effect.

Is coaching any different? Well, it seems it is. Although relatively new, its track record is impressive. For example, a study of coaching in a public sector municipal agency found that training alone increased productivity by 22.4%. However, training combined with one-on-coaching increased productivity by 88%. (Public Personnel Management, Washington, 1997).

An executive at Motorola University said that companies need four things for their employees: "learning maps, time to make the transition, access to technology, and **we need to provide coaches.**"

What is Coaching?

What exactly is this thing called coaching? Tom Peters in his book A Passion for Excellence gave just about the best textbook definition when he wrote: Coaching is the process of enabling others to act, of building on their strengths. It's counting on others to use their own special skill and competence, and then giving them enough room and enough time to do it.

At its very simplest, coaching is a conversation. But it is a conversation with a specific purpose. There is an agenda. As a matter of fact, according to The Coaches Training Institute, there are two agendas:

1. There is the little 'a' agenda. That is the issue that the client brings to a coaching session.
2. There is also the Big 'A' Agenda. It is the coach's job to ensure that the small 'a' agenda is addressed within the context of the Big 'A,' always moving the client forward. For private clients, the movement is towards balance, process, and fulfillment. For corporate clients, the movement is usually focused on autonomy, accountability, and action.

Coaching in Organizations

Daniel Goleman, EQ guru, in his soon-to-be-released book, "Primal Leadership," writes that "executives should relentlessly seek the truth about themselves" through coaching focused on self-discovery.

1. Managers as coaches. Many organizations want their managers to learn about coaching so they can use coaching techniques and thus develop a coaching culture. However, reducing coaching to a set of techniques is akin to humans believing they can learn to fly by studying the aerodynamics of flight. As Russ Volckman, Ph.D. writes, "Everyone should coach; however, everyone should not and cannot be a coach".

Coaching is an attitude. It is a philosophy. That is why developing coaches in organizations begins with designing an alliance based on mutual respect, trust, and confidentiality. Because self-awareness is the foundation for high EQ (emotional intelligence), time is devoted to understanding the self, particularly one's values and perspectives.

The Center for Creative Leadership in Greenboro, North Carolina, has determined that leaders derail **because of emotional competencies** – inability to adapt to change, failure to build teams, and ineffective interpersonal skills.

It is obvious that effective coaching managers must have a high level of emotional competency.

2. Internal coaches. Some organizations are hiring an on-site coach – someone specifically tasked with being a coach. Certainly, a coach has a positive impact on the workplace climate, and there can be cost savings. The biggest disadvantages are: (a) The hierarchy is maintained and the coach, as an employee, may be ignored by higher level executives; (b) The coach becomes a part of the team, developing alliances and possibly losing objectivity; (c) Confidentiality may be questioned; (d) The role of coach may be eroded by the addition of other responsibilities.

3. External coaches. External coaches are usually hired for a specific project or to work with specific individuals in the organization. There are many advantages to hiring an external coach: (a) It is a powerful recruitment and retention tool; (b) The coach is completely objective, unencumbered by in-house relationships/politics; (c) Confidentiality ensures a stronger level of trust and allows for deeper shifts in the client.

When to coach?

Jim Rohn, motivational speaker, says, "We could all use a little coaching. When you're in the game, it's hard to think of everything."

Coaching can be utilized in just about any situation where there is a desire for change and a need for forward movement.

In organizations, coaching is relevant for performance management, goal setting and goal getting, strategic planning, designing a learning plan, succession planning, developing talent,

addressing emotional competencies, building relationships, developing high-impact teams, conflict resolution, engaging in any difficult conversation, and ... the list goes on. Besides one-to-one coaching, coaches can work with groups and teams to uncover and improve group dynamics. Some tools that a coach may use include personality assessments and 360 feedback.

Finding One's Potential!

"Dealing with people is like digging for gold: When you go digging for an ounce of gold, you have to move tons of dirt to get an ounce of gold. But when you go digging, you don't go looking for the dirt, you go looking for the gold." Andrew Carnegie

Coaches are indeed gold diggers. The 'dirt' they find usually takes the form of 'gremlins' which maintain an existing status quo and thus block creative problem-solving initiatives. A professional coach helps individuals overcome personal obstacles, maximize individual strengths, and reach full potential. Is your organization ready?