

After the Teambuilding

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Tips for Maximizing Change Efforts

A Resource for the Future: Coaches For Business

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Do I Need a Coach?

Most of us, at one time or another, take on some result to produce which is outside of our immediate grasp. If we have the basic skills to get the job done but are stretching ourselves, then we must face up to the fact that we need some guidance. We need someone with knowledge of our skills and a perspective on the business who will advise us. We need someone who appreciates us, but more important, believes in our ability to learn, accomplish and grow. We need someone without any hidden or conflicting agendas. We need a coach.

Coaching is not new. Athletes and musicians have always had coaches, and recently many quickly advancing executives and CEOs have coaches. Most executives are just beginning to learn the value of coaching. They are finding that coaches ask them useful questions that they “should have been asking before.” So says a client recently interviewed in Inc. Magazine.¹ In an article on coaching in their June issue author Joshua Hyatt discusses the fact that a resident of any given culture *will* be blind to certain questions or issues. A good coach can ferret out the issues you don’t see, those you ignore, those you side-step, and those issues you would rather not deal with but must.

¹ Hyatt, Joshua, “The Zero-Defect CEO,” Inc. Magazine, Goldhirsch Group, Inc., June, 1997

How do you go about finding a coach? How do you engage one? What do you do with a coach when you find one? These questions are addressed in this issue of “After the Teambuilding.” In particular, I will discuss how to decide whether any given coach is the one for you and how to design your coaching relationship.

Only you can say who the right coach is for you. Even after you have started working with a coach, if you are uncomfortable with him or her or if you aren’t producing the results you want to produce, you should consider finding someone else to coach you. Each coaching relationship is unique and personal.

Credentials

Coaching is a relatively new area of work for most coaches *and* clients. Two coaching advocacy groups, Coach University and The International Coaching Federation, have proposed a set of criteria for the accreditation of business coaches, but as yet there are no professional credentials that are universally acknowledged. This is not to say that the criteria these two groups have devised are invalid, just that the only *truly reliable* coaching credentials as yet, are results.

You can, however, use some common sense in your search. Interview your coach.

1) Interview more than one prospective coach and check his or her credentials. Ask not only how long they have been coaching, but what training they have received, and how their coaching differs from mentoring, teaching or other coaching.

2) Make sure a coach either has achieved the type goal you are pursuing or has coached others who have. It is not necessary that your coach has had clients who did exactly what you want to do, but that those clients have faced the same sorts of dilemmas or cultural interference that you will.

3) Allow your prospective coach to interview you as well. A good coach will ask questions that allow you to guide yourself into the decisions you want to make.

4) Get names of references and talk to them. Ask them how they felt while working with the coach and how quickly they produced results relative to their original expectations. Was the coach always on time for meetings? Did the coach's guidance include asking provocative questions or was it limited to offering advice?

The Design

Intentionally set up your relationship and payment schedule before the first paid session. The quality of the coaching is proportional to the caliber of the relationship between the coach and the coachee. The only way to achieve this quality relationship satisfactorily is to rigorously design it.

Take the time at the outset to get *all* of your questions answered and to put the pieces in place for a strong relationship. Don't think that you will work it out over time. Your time is too valuable and coaches are too expen-

sive to drift into a relationship. There are six parts² to the process of setting up this relationship:

- ***You, the player, must have a big goal.*** If you are seeking coaching to maintain the status quo—or worse, as a status symbol—there won't be enough "grist for the mill." To have a successful coaching relationship, you must be out to produce results of a different magnitude than you have the past. An important result makes it worth the considerable effort involved.

- ***Your coach should be someone you trust and respect.*** It is important that you trust your coach because you must feel you can communicate freely at all times. It is important also to respect your coach, to treat the work you do together as special. It doesn't work to set deadlines and then treat them casually. Meeting times, deadlines and other agreements should be sacred.

- ***Is what this person does really coaching?*** It is important not only to be clear that there is a difference between coaching, mentoring and teaching but it is important that it be clear what you are asking for. Does your coach just like helping people, or is your coach a true professional around whom people thrive? See the discussion of teaching, mentoring and coaching below.

- ***He or she wants to coach you.*** This is a powerful relationship you are entering into. You should not need to do any convincing. If you have made your request and the enthusiasm is not there, don't force it. Find someone else.

- ***He or she must be competent at coaching in this area.*** This is different from simply being an expert. Do coachees thrive around the coach? Do coachees have original ideas about their work during sessions with this coach? Experts know their subject, but

coaches know how to have the coachee develop his or her own expertise.

- ***Your coach is strongly committed to your success.*** They win when you win, and they lose if you lose. They are willing to be ruthless with you in the service of producing the end result you are committed to. They won't accept reasons or excuses for not taking action. During your interview, ask about the length of the typical coaching contract. A coach with short-term contracts probably produces results moves on, the coach with long-term contracts may make people dependent on him or her.

Do you have a situation for which you need some coaching? Call Jennifer Guy at (609)921-3139 for ½ hour of free personalized coaching.

- ***The results you want to produce are clear and concise.*** There are times when you won't have a choice about who is coaching you. If you have a personality problem that is hindering your career or damaging the office environment, you may feel you are required to accept coaching from your boss or the Human Resources department.

Even so, follow the model of setting up a relationship. If you do not, then the results of the coaching will be limited even more than they are already. Be straight about your concerns. Ask questions, "I am not sure we can have a great coaching relationship because... Let's talk about it."

Often the most powerful relationships are between those who have agreed to disagree, or those who are clear they don't like each other. The power comes from being straight about it from the start.

Other Conditions

If you take care with designing the coaching relationship you will be set

² This design framework is based on work done by The London Perret Roche Group, an "alma mater" of mine. They conduct large-scale change efforts with Fortune 500 Companies

up to succeed. The next step is to pay attention to the structure in which you are being coached.

Listen

You have to be willing to listen to your coach. In other words, if your coach says to prepare no less than one hour for a ½ hour report, then do it. Hiring a coach and not doing what he or she tells you doesn't make sense and it is a waste of your time. If you ignore your coach's advice you will find yourself justifying your reasons for not following directions, which will lead to diminishing freedom in this relationship.

Understand

You should never take any action you cannot understand. You are responsible for the success of the coaching relationship, not the coach. You are the one who must do the work and you can never blame your coach for telling you to do something if it turns out to be the wrong thing.

If you don't understand your coach's advice or find yourself unwilling to take it, speak up. Find out what the coach is addressing with this recommendation. You are responsible for seeing the value of the actions you are advised to take. If you ever hear yourself blaming the coach for something not going well, WAKE UP.

The Gap

You must be able to see a big gap between how things are, and how you want them to be. Your coach will raise the bar the minute you get things under control. He or she should be constantly calling on you to be bigger, more powerful, more concise, more effective.

The Results

You must be very clear about the results you want to produce. Write them down, track them and manage

them. Because of the "no-holds-barred" nature of the relationship, it is easy to get sidetracked with tangential, but seemingly important issues. If you are certain about the results you are out to produce, then those results will provide guidelines for your meetings.

Teacher/Mentor/Coach

mentor: A wise and trusted counselor or teacher.

teach: To impart knowledge or skill to: *teaches children.*

To provide knowledge of; instruct in: *teaches French.*

train: To make proficient with specialized instruction and practice.

coach: *Sports.* A person who trains or directs athletes or athletic teams.

a. A person who gives instruction, as in singing or acting. **b.** A private tutor employed to prepare a student for an examination.

You can see from the definitions of teacher, mentor and coach that there is a good deal of overlap in these three terms. Teachers often coach, coaches often mentor and mentors often teach, so it is important that you determine whether that what you need is coaching before you engage a coach.

A **mentor** is usually someone in the industry in a higher hierarchical position than you are who takes an interest in your career. A mentor introduces you to influential people and can give you some valuable perspective when you are in a quandary about decision-making or career moves. Mentors don't usually roll up their sleeves and attend meetings with you to spot the weaknesses in the way you work. They generally take a long-term view and provide very high-level guidance.

A **teacher** imparts knowledge. A teacher will assess your skill and give you information to fill the gaps you have identified. A teacher is necessary

when you need to acquire information or understanding of a given subject.

A **trainer** imparts skill. Trainers will work with you and usually through repetition, will instill or refine a skill. A trainer will isolate weak spots in your actions and show you new ways to streamline or improve your habits.

"A single conversation across the table with a wise man is better than ten years' mere study of books."

Longfellow, Hyperion (1839)

A **coach** watches you work and then distinguish new *pathways* for your actions. Coaches are interested in why you took certain actions and what it looked like in the fray. They take that information and offer a new way of interpreting circumstances. This new interpretation creates new openings for action which results in different actions the next time the coachee is presented with similar circumstances.

The purpose of having a coach is to have another pair of eyes looking at your actions and another perspective guiding you to new openings for those actions. It is all in the service of producing results which are currently outside of your grasp.

In a mentoring or teaching situation, the information flows from the teacher to the student or from the mentor to the mentoree. Coaching, on the other hand, requires a higher level of engagement on the part of the coach. The coach will be required to find new ways of getting a point across. Coaches must constantly examine their own motivations and prejudices. To each coaching session, they must bring a full commitment to doing whatever it takes to distinguish hidden issues for the coachee. The coach may find him or herself addressing personal doubts and

uncertainties as the coachee inquires more and more deeply into the source of his or her actions.

It is important to understand the demands that coaching puts on the coach in order to underline the importance of the relationship. It is not the type of relationship that is trivial to either partner but even so, it is *likely* that the depth of the relationship will be overlooked in the interview and selection process. Your coach should know-ledgeable about working in this type of intimate way in a business environ-ment.

“He that teaches himself has a fool for a master.”

Benjamin Franklin 1706 - 1790
American Scientist and Statesman

Coaching has much to offer the executive who wants to develop him or herself to be increasingly valuable in the workplace. If you don't tend the relationship and approach it with the rigor it needs, you will find yourself spending money and attaining nothing. If, however, you carefully interview your coach and then set up and manage the relationship and your goals over time, your effectiveness can skyrocket in all areas. As with any new resource, learning to use it well can take time, but the rewards are well worth the effort involved.

Upcoming Issues

Over the past year, there have been newsletter issues on acknowledgment, jargon, redesigning communication, culture change, and project management. In upcoming issues I will continue the series on project management and examine coaching from various points of view. In addition to that, I will discuss and examine other issues around dealing with change.

There is a seemingly endless supply of topics which I gather from my consulting work but I welcome suggestions for topics of interest to my readers.

Some Professional Coaching Sources:

- *Many business consultants also offer coaching.*

- *There is a web site called COACH UNIVERSITY (<http://www.coachu.com>). The entrepreneurial Thomas Leonard has put together much information, including a coaching training course and referral service. He offers tips on coaching and successfully managing your business. Coach University, 2484 Bering Dr., Houston, Texas 77057; 800-48COACH; 800-FAX-5655, Info@coachu.com (automated brochure).*

- **FRANKLIN COVEY Co.;** *Stephen M. Covey, Covey Leadership Center, 3507 North, University Ave., Suite 100, Provo, UT 84604; 888-332-3013*

- **INTERNATIONAL COACH FEDERATION;** *2123 FM 1960 West, Suite 219; Houston, TX 77002; 1-888-ICF-3131; 1-888-FAX2ICF; info@coachfederation.com. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) offers an on-line referral service at its Web site (www.coachfederation.org), as well as a free biweekly newsletter, *Coaching News*. The sample I reviewed had little to do with coaching, and lots to do with the ICF but all you need is one good tip per issue to make it worth your while.*

- **ICOACH;** *My coaching specialty is implementing learning from change efforts in organizations which have change programs in progress. I confer with executives and workers alike to coach them in turning the information they gain into actions at their desk. I help them answer the question*

“Now what?” when they aren't sure how certain concepts apply to their particular situation. If needed, I can also recommend coaches with expertise in specific areas.

Other Resources

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

James Waldroop and Timothy Butler have written a comprehensive article on coaching from the perspective of a coach, but is very useful for a coachee as well. It gives some insight as to how coaches view the work they have to do and avoids the omnipresent sports metaphors that until recently have dominated any coaching articles.

“The Executive As Coach,” Waldroop, James and Butler, Timothy, The Harvard Business Review, Harvard Business School Publishing, November-December 1996 - Reprint No. 96611

FAST COMPANY

Fast Company is a fast growing magazine which has just completed its first year of publication. It takes a very irreverent view of most established ideas which is sometimes unsettling and sometimes refreshing. Over the past year they have done many articles which have touched on coaching and is, in general, a wealth of knowledge on change in organizations.

The magazine is clearly designed to appeal to the younger worker, but is very well researched and well written. It has a “consultant debunking unit” which has taken many popular consulting standbys (If a butterfly flaps its wings in Tokyo...) and uncovered the technical truth about them. They are somewhat harsh, but clear.

Fast Company, published bi-monthly by U.S. News and World Report is also available on the Web at (<http://www.FastCompany.com>).