

After the Teambuilding

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Tips for Maximizing Change Efforts

Ready, Aim, Coach

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After the Teambuilding
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Coaching is getting a lot of press these days. Descriptions run the gamut. In one article coaching is called an executive accessory. In another it is described as repackaged management practices and in still others, it is the new panacea for business. Magazines, internet sites and training companies are taking advantage of the interest in coaching. They are providing classes, interactive sites and written materials — all professing to teach people how to coach.

Without wanting to take away from any of the valuable work that anyone is doing in the area of coaching, I don't think coaching can be reduced to a set of "how to's" any more than parenting or becoming an artist can. There are indeed skills that can be taught, but coaching, like parenting and creating art requires insight, a rich set of distinctions and experience that is difficult to get from training sessions.

Coaching is distinct from training, teaching, advising or managing. A coach doesn't solve problems. The coach enables the coachee to see the problem or issue in a new way so that he/she can take effective action.

This newsletter outlines a process to target the issues which need coaching. It sets up the coaching, outlining all of the conversations that zero in on the problem(s) at hand and is done at the very beginning of the coaching session. (This targetting process is intended to be used in conjunction with "Coaches: A Resource for Business,"¹ a previous issue of this newsletter which outlines what to look for in a coach and how to design a relationship with a coach.)

After the issues have been targetted, the actual coaching process could go in any number of directions. It is too complicated to provide a "how-to" for the coaching process so I have pro-

vided a set of tips for both the coach and the coachee to help you through it. But even if you don't go into a full-fledged coaching conversation, the process outlined here can provide valuable insight—even into problems that have seemed intractable.

Coaching may not be a panacea for business but it can provide many new avenues for success for today's businessperson.

The Targetting Process

Coaches: It is your job to manage the conversation and to make sure you are doing a complete job of setting up the session. Don't be too anxious to resolve any situation quickly. Let the coachee do the work even if it causes some struggle. You do not have to have the answer to qualify as a coach. And if you do, keep it to yourself!

Coachees: It is your job to be coached. It is important that you respect your coach and that your attitude is one of exploration and looking for value. Don't jump too quickly to easy answers.

Defining the Issue

- **Coachee:** Describe the problem. Keep the facts separate from any assessments, judgements or evaluations.
- **Coach:** Repeat the problem.
- **Coachee:** If the coach has it perfectly, go on. If not, correct the coach.
- **Coach:** Keep saying the problem until you have it perfectly. (Do not shortchange this step.)

(This step will have you distinguishing the facts from the assessments, judgements and evaluations about the facts. It is important that you do this step completely or you will go off on tangents.)

¹ See my newsletter "Coaches: A Resource for Business" April/May 1997, for information on how to find a coach and begin a coaching relationship.

Distinguishing

• **Coach:** How can you “chunk” the issue down into distinct components? Are there different aspects to the issue that you can distinguish between?

i.e., “there is both a materials issue and a process issue here,” or “you need to deal with both the facts and your relationship with your boss.”

Where is the Challenge?

• **Coach:** Find out which components are the ones that challenge the coachee.

• **Coachee:** Highlight or circle the components that are a problem.

• **Coachee:** What conditions would have to exist for you to solve your problem? Who would you need to be? (The president of the company? Superperson? Mr. Spock?) What would you do if you were that person?

The Request

• **Coach:** What can I help you with? (Sometimes clarifying the problem is enough.)

• **Coachee:** Make your request.

• **Coach:** Write down the request. Repeat the request. (Get feedback as before until the request is clear.)

• **Coach:** Can you provide what the coachee wants? (If yes, proceed, if no, use your time together to determine where the coachee can get what he/she needs.)

The Coaching Process

• **Coach:** What questions can you ask that will distinguish the coachee’s paradigm (limits). Where is the coachee saying or thinking “I can’t do that,” or “I can’t say that”? Ask questions that reveal his or her preconceptions.

• **Coach:** It is important that you not try to solve the problem, but rather aid the coachee in solving the problem. Write down some questions you could ask that would reveal the coachee’s limits.

e.g., “How do you know you will lose your job if you ask that question?” This will help determine whether an assumption is un-examined. Your job is to help the coachees examine these things so they begin to see to *what degree they are self-imposed*.

Tips for the Coach:

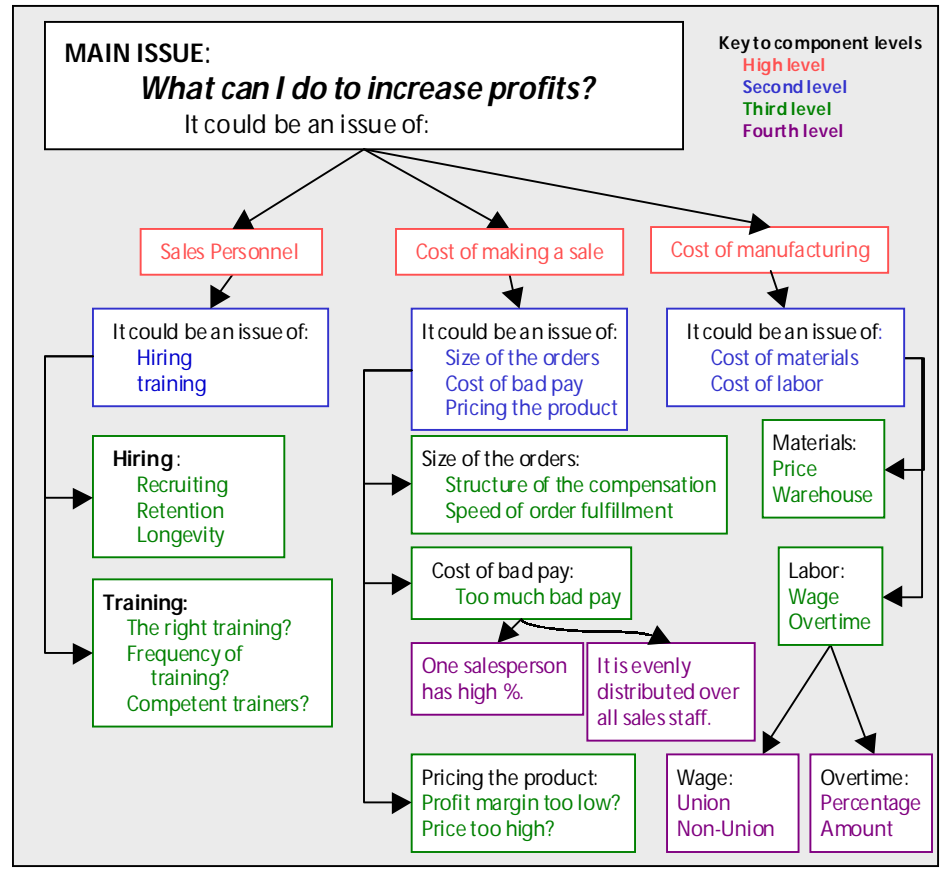
There is no template for the actual coaching session. Here are a few things to remember:

• The coachee might come up with a better solution than the one you may think you already know. Don’t be a know-it-all.

• The principles of “Inquiry and Advocacy”²

“Chunking it” Example

The main issue is at the top of the chart. Each issue is broken down into finer and finer components until it is distinguished at a “level” at which actions can be taken. Note: Do not assume that your coachee (or your coach) has the same facility with this type of distinguishing that you do. Make sure you are thinking at the same level.



• People’s actions are perfectly correlated to how the world seems. If the situation seems untenable, the coachee will hesitate to take action. If it seems accessible, the coachee will get right into action.

• Distinguishing alters how the world seems.

• Never provide coaching to someone who doesn’t want it.

• The coachee is always the one who needs to take action. He or she must choose. Do not convince or persuade the coachee.

• Ask if you are providing something useful for the coachee during the session. This helps to focus on the desired result.

Tips for the Coachee:

• Give the coach permission to coach you.

• Listen to your coach.

• Live up to the view the coach has of you, not necessarily the one you have of yourself.

• Assume that there is a solution to the problem and that you just don’t see it because your paradigm is too limited.

² Senge, Peter, “Balancing Inquiry and Advocacy”

The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook, Doubleday, 1994, pp. 253.

Completion

• **Coach:** Acknowledge the coachee for his/her work .

• **Coachee:** Thank the coach for his/her insight and help.

In conclusion

Learning any new skill requires the use of templates or recipes of some sort which make it easy to practice the skill. At the beginning, your follow-through might be awkward or incomplete or your responses might seem canned. After some experience, practice and reflection on your effectiveness, you will graduate to a more natural and self-generated style. The template itself will become less useful at that point and might even feel restrictive. That is the time to discard it ... or better, give it to someone else who is learning to coach.

Try before you buy. Do you need coaching on how to coach or other business issues? Call 609-921-3139 for 1/2 hour of free personalized coaching.