

Corporate coaching

HOW COULD SOMETHING AS TOUCHY-FEELY AS COACHING BE A PRIORITY FOR BUSINESS?

The basic purpose of coaching is to "convey a valued person from where he or she is to where he or she wants to be". Not just to be utilized when an individual is broken.

Coaching is a term that is often misunderstood in the business world. "Few chief executives will talk about it." (Conlin, 2002, p. 98). The fear is that if an executive endorses coaching they are perceived to be a weak leader or have a weak organization. The term is often referred to in conjunction with performance issues, development needs, or behaviors that need to be fixed and should not be discussed or addressed openly. In reality, coaching is a leadership tool that is quite different than performance counseling. Witherspoon (2000) describes coaching as bringing out the best in people. The basic purpose of coaching is to "convey a valued person from where he or she is to where he or she wants to be" (p. 167). Not just to be utilized when an individual is broken. Hargrove (2003) expands on Witherspoon's definition by stating that through coaching individuals and teams can be coached by a Masterful Coach which "inspires, empowers, and enables people to live deeply in the future, while at the same time acting boldly in the present" (p. 12). Therefore, coaching results in fostering a new way of thinking, encourages self awareness, promotes confidence, and increases personal productivity – all for the intention of maximizing organizational success. Why it is then that coaching is misperceived?

The vantage point from an executive team is that the rhetoric used to define coaching is filled with touchy-feely jargon and is often dismissed as an important tool when developing a business strategy (Ludeman & Erlandson, 2004). For those coachees that realize and have experienced the benefits of coaching it is often a struggle to understand why the link of coaching to business results is not realized. Why is it that corporate organizations perceive coaching as something that really is only a resource when someone is in deep need for making a major breakthrough? For a moment reflect and compare the perception of coaching from an athletic organization. Winning athletes view coaching as an essential to achieving success not a tool to use at when others suggest you need to. Whereas a corporate organization views coaching as more of a frill rather than a tool for winning. Participants in organizations dread the expense of having to provide coaching or participate in coaching when needed.

The purpose of this discussion is to determine what value coaching really does have to an organization and if it truly pays off. Using a proven coaching system within the organization make coaching a viable tool for gaining a competitive edge. To start this discovery it is important to review documented benefits and returns coaching has accomplished in the business world to date.

THE PROS AND CONS OF CORPORATE COACHING

Coaching Benefits

A study conducted by Watson Wyatt Worldwide of North American companies concluded that organizations that have "superior human capital practices" generate excellent returns for their shareholders (Salopek, 2000). The findings indicate that organizations that invest in disciplines such as coaching are finding benefits to the bottom line. One example comes from New Zealand where a MetrixGlobal survey revealed that business coaching produces a 788 percent return on investment (ROI) in addition to intangible benefits to the business that

were not measured (Jayne, 2004). With these high rates of return coaching has specifically generated a positive impact by: 1) attracting and retaining quality people; 2) establishing retention of skills from training; 3) instilling core role competencies; and 4) development of leadership teams.

The key to coaching that generates business results is the fact that coaching works on developing the internal qualities of a person's being which manifests an increase in external competencies within the business (Wales, 2002). For example, internal qualities include increasing a manager's self-confidence and awareness of their interpersonal skills with

others. "The most important reason executives derail in their careers is their insensitivity and inability to understand the perspectives of others" (Kouzes and Posner, 2000, p. 91). By utilizing coaching to increase a manager's skill level the manager becomes more assertive, handles stress, has the ability to implement necessary changes and overall becomes a productive contributor and generator for the business (Hargrove, 2003).

In addition to managerial and leadership benefits, coaching provides an important tool and resource to business strategy. Lyons (2000) states that coaching provides a method for aligning the needs of the business with the developmental needs of the people. When this coaching purpose and definition is understood and practiced within the organization, the organization creates a competitive edge that is very hard to duplicate. Managers of the future will no longer be needed to just leverage the business machine. The manager of the future must evolve to a leader that is a coach and motivator to the followers they lead.

Coaching Pitfalls

Although coaching has been proven to be extremely beneficial, coaching has its dangers and pitfalls to the organization if not implemented effectively. The three main failures of coaching in the business setting is the lack of support for coaching, confusion as to what the purpose of coaching is, and poor coaching

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practices (Wigman, 2003).

Lack of support for coaching comes as a result of leaders being pressured to meet budgets, run the business with fewer people and operate at a high rate of speed. When the leader's performance is measured by operational or process criteria they tend to overlook "the human and behavioral aspects of change, typically leading to disastrous results (Malone, 2001, p. 27). Adding another aspect to their job to monitor, such as coaching, generates a negative feeling or lack of support for the process.

When coaching is inappropriately implemented people have bad experiences. For example there are managers that say they are coaching an employee when they actually are enforcing management expectations. There are coaches that are more interested in fixing or relieving a person from the organization than they are in the success of the coachee. Some companies experience coaches as people that simply make matters worse. Berglas (2002) describes ineffective coaches that develop a rapport with the CEO and end up gaining significant power over the organization. These misuses and abuses of coaching generate mistrust and a lack of respect for coaching methodology.

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CORPORATE COACHING OPTIONS

Executive Coaching

Executives are in a situation where people typically don't provide them the coaching they need to be successful. A favorite story told through the years that applies to this concern goes like this: A friend called me one day and said, "I have some good news and some bad news. First, the good news. I just got a promotion as VP of Operations! The bad news is - this is the last time I will ever hear the truth!" Yes, executives are at a disadvantage to hear honest feedback. Because of their role position they often do not get the coaching they need from peers, direct reports and members that could truly help them smooth their rough edges. Since executives are critical to developing the company culture it is key that people are encouraged to tell the truth to the executive team of what is going on in the organization so executives can make the appropriate decisions in a timely manner (Conlin, 2002).

In addition to executive coaching providing candid feedback for personal development, Evered and Selman (1989) point out that most organizations would benefit from a cultural change that is driven by managers transforming themselves into coaches. Brad Anderson, CEO of Best Buy, coaches 100 to 200 employees in one month (Boyle, 2005). Anderson believes that his position as the top executive is to communicate his vision one-on-one to employees to generate a human connection. By executives learning how to become great coaches they will be able to duplicate through efforts and vision through others.

Coaching and Training

Organizations provide training because they want the participants to learn new methods and skills. One of the biggest concerns to making an investment in

traditional training initiatives is the application of what is learned to on the job performance. Academic studies show that participants are not practicing or have forgotten what they learned in the training session by the time they get back into the work place (Bowen, 2004). When coaching is combined with training the results of applied skills dramatically increased. "A study published by the International Personnel Management Association reveals that workforce training increases productivity by 22.4 percent, while training combined with coaching results in an overall productivity gain of 88 percent" (Berard, 2005, p. 32). In order to ensure that training programs have this rate of success coaching needs to be added to the training process as a normal way of doing business. Not be confused with adding additional expenses to the bottom line.

Coaching and Mentoring

Mentors can provide the organization with the model of what right looks like. The ideal mentor is "someone who has already achieved the success that you would like to achieve and wants to help you achieve the same or even greater success" (Bowen, 2004). A mentor is an individual that has experienced the objectives or skills that the people in the organization desire to attain. When combining mentoring with coaching the organization will succeed in their purpose for utilizing a mentor. For example, an individual or mentor can have the experience but not the ability to connect, relate or coach others. The relationship is the key to a mentoring program being successful. Therefore, hire a mentor with great coaching skills.

Coaching for Performance

"The most critical factor in achieving positive long-term improvement is consistent, ongoing interaction and follow-up" (Jacobson, 2005, p. 40). Coaching is the tool that develops average performers into high performers. Recently through a series of interviews employees have commented on the lack of feedback they have received from their managers on their performance. It seems there is a trend that managers are struggling with the ability to coach others to a higher level of performance. By managers playing a passive role in daily opportunities for coaching (Grayson & Larson, 2000) coaching is not perceived as nurturing, wanted or helpful.

Coaching is a tool where a manager can switch hats from telling to influencing. Coaching provides an opportunity for managers to teach and create a learning culture. By utilizing coaching as a development tool learning can be tailored to the learner (Thach & Heinselman, 2000). Overall, those managers that have utilized coaching for leadership development and specific development of competencies have determined that people feel valued, develop at a faster rate and retained team members that would not have stayed within the organization.

Coaching for Organizational Change

A coach is a thinking partner (Hargrove, 2003). Instead of telling people

that change is necessary, coaching allows people the right framework to buy-in to the change. It is not uncommon for an executive team to strategize about a change, discuss it and then proceed to roll out the change to the rest of the organization. When this occurs, a high level of resistance from the rest of members that were not involved in the planning of the change ignites. Most often the management team gets disgusted because the members are "resistive to change" and don't effectively

know how to get the members on board. The common reaction from management to resist change is to "sell them" on the change or "coerce them" into trying it. Either approach on average costs the organization three months in wasted energy from distracted team members (Whitaker, 2004).

The coaching model increases productivity when executing change by helping people to expand their own capacity to accept the change and apply it to their situation. The purpose of utilizing coaching when implementing change is to provide businesses with a format for obtaining buy-in within a twenty-

four hour period. This is a huge savings to the bottom line.

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COMPONENTS FOR COACHING TO SUCCEED

At this point there have been numerous examples of how the benefits of coaching outweigh the pitfalls to coaching. It would not be uncommon for an executive team to quickly want to launch coaching as part of their business strategy from the evidence that has been provided. However, if certain criteria are not in place within an organization coaching will fail and will not provide the return on investment as described. Therefore, before coaching is launched within a winning strategy the following components must exist.

Management Team Philosophy & Support

The process for creating a coaching culture, as with any initiative, is gaining the support of the executive team. This can be accomplished by discussing the benefits and pitfalls to coaching and making a determination if coaching would compliment the business strategy. An adapted version of Hargrove's Breakthrough Model (2003) encourages the following agenda for determining if coaching is a match for the organization.

- 1) First, get all management team members together and discuss how coaching would benefit the organization's vision of the future.
- 2) Perform an informal audit of "what is working for us: and "what is not working" to determine if coaching would be a tool to achieve more opportunities rather breakdowns.
- 3) If the team determines coaching looks favorable, create one or two

- stretch goals for incorporating coaching within the organization.
- 4) Create a compelling case for implementing coaching with the business strategy.
 - 5) Determine how the stretch goals apply to each individual member on the management team. What's in it for them? (WIIFM)
 - 6) Discuss what learning each member would need to engage in to reach the determined goals.

Coaching Education

As discussed previously, good managers and mentors don't necessarily make good coaches. The goal would be to provide opportunities for managers to learn the skills to coaching through training and follow-up coaching sessions with an external, skilled coach. The key to learning how to coach is to first understand the purpose of coaching and how coaching fits within the strategy of the organization. Training managers on great coaching skills and ensuring follow-up with each coaching-leader on a regular basis is critical to ensure coaching will work throughout the organization.

Quality Coaches

Often organizations make the mistake that by offering training and coaching to managers they are not quality coaches. Coaching cannot be done to someone; the individual must do the inner work his/her self (Hudson, 1999). Therefore, a quality coach is one that facilitates others to develop self-thought, generate areas for improvement and determine solutions for their future. A quality coach helps others realize their personal limitations through effective coaching conversations. Once the coachee recognizes a barrier to success a coach creates an inspirational dissatisfaction in the coachee and leaves with a renewed spirit. Coaches aren't perfect they just have to have the right intentions. Once the organization feel quality coaches are in place the coaching initiative can be launched.

Coaching Communication

There is nothing worse to stifle a coaching initiative than to get people off to the wrong perspective of why the organization is utilizing coaching as a part of its culture. When people don't understand the purpose to coaching they jump to negative assumptions. This can be avoided by having the executive team meet with all of the employees as to what the roles, expectations, objectives and vision entails for incorporating coaching linked to the business strategy. The commitment from each executive to communicate their stretch goals for coaching to the rest of the employees will generate a spirit throughout the organization followed by a high level of commitment for the coaching process.

Coaching Rewards & Measurements

By implementing coaching into the business strategy remarkable events will occur. It is important to take time out of the busy, fast-paced business world

"What gets
measured
gets done"

and celebrate the accomplishment of what coaching has accomplished for individuals, teams, and business success. Ashkenhas, Ulrich, Jick, & Kerr, S. (2002) suggest that rewards be based on coaching performance and skill, shared throughout the organization and provided in a nonfinancial package.

The old saying goes, "What gets measured gets done". The same is true for coaching. In order to know if the coaching strategy is bringing about the expected results a system for tracking and measuring coaching results will need to be implemented. What is tracked and measured must tie back to the business strategy. For example, desired performance, expectations, skills and behaviors that are now occurring which did not exist prior to coaching are areas to track and measure (Berard, 2005).

CONCLUSION

The people running businesses today are most likely the Alpha Male or Alpha Female that has trouble admitting they need help or even thinking about where coaching fits into the real business world. These people are typically smarter than others, risk takers, demanding and have little patience for topics about people or feelings (Ludemand & Erlandson, 2004). Because of the Alpha's intense nature and the way they make decisions, coaching has to be communicated as a viable business tool that without it they are going to lose their competitive edge.

The failure of the coach to not linking coaching as a tool for business strategy is a result of not "communicating in Alphaspeak" (Ludemand & Erlandson, 2004, p. 64). This means that in order to get the attention of the executive team that coaching deserves, the benefits to coaching, coaching options, and coaching results have to be expressed in a "highly data oriented" manner. Charts, bullet points, trends, spread sheets and statistics are avenues to get the Alpha's attention to what is missing in their business solution (see Appendix A). The example in the following Appendix is a spreadsheet that has been developed to help team members develop their ability to Alphaspeak.

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APPENDIX*

Leadership Matrix

* Organizational Structure and Design class model example developed by Mary Kay Whitaker