



Mpowerment Matters

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Management Mpowerment Associates

Forward to a Colleague



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Organizational leaders have varied reactions when it comes to the subject of coaching. While most see the benefits when others are to be coached, some are reluctant to envision the same benefits from undergoing coaching themselves. This can occur because people, as a rule, do not see their own weaknesses or need for improvement as clearly as they see them in others. Or, it may be that they are well aware of their own weaknesses, but do not want them exposed by others, nor do they want to hear negative feedback.

Leaders must be made aware of the fact that coaching is a benefit that will further their ability to lead and to be of value to the organization as a whole. Few would be negative about a personal trainer, or a personal tennis or golf coach. In the greater scheme of things, leadership development is critical to the success of many, much more so than individual physical development.

Leaders should view coaching as an opportunity to grow professionally. They should examine the process closely to understand how it works, and what they need to do to effectuate permanent change. Attitudinal change leads to positive behavioral changes, which in turn leads to improved results. The starting point is the attitude, the willingness to examine values and beliefs. The process is ongoing, with the leader carrying out an action plan even after the actual coaching has ceased. Leaders derive motivation from their results, which then continues to fuel the entire process. A successful coaching experience can carry a good leader to even greater possibilities.

Coaching Leaders for Change

How do you convince leaders to change? How can you optimize their talents and potential?

Executive coaching offers a tremendous opportunity to leverage leadership talent and resources, both of which can steer an organization toward sustainable success. Coaching is no longer reserved for problem leaders. It is more frequently sought by top performers whose organizations value their management and growth potential.

Establishing Ground Rules

In the beginning, coaches must clarify the ground rules, calling attention to the following key areas:

1. **Confidentiality, expectations and commitment:** The coach must be clear about what will be shared with the leader's boss and what will be kept confidential. Aligning coaching goals with the organization's principal objectives is crucial.
2. **Reporting relationships:** There must be clarity among the organizational contact (boss or HR representative), coach and leader.
3. **Methods of information gathering:** Key stakeholders, team members, direct reports and others involved will be contacted by both the coach and the leader.
4. **Making judgments, setting objectives and monitoring progress:** The coach helps the leader and key

stakeholders maintain objectivity. Coaches must focus on one or two behaviors, without judgment, and facilitate honest sharing about progress.

5. **How, why and when the coaching will end:** Coaching parameters must be set at the beginning of the engagement, with milestones for assessing progress and a completion date (usually 12 to 18 months).

It is critical to clarify at the outset *who the client is*. When the coach and leader understand that the company is the actual client, then the ground rules are easier to accept. Once the ground rules have been established, they cannot be bent along the way.

Measuring Sustainable Success

Success *isn't* measured by:

- How well the leader performs with the coach's help. It must be judged on how well he or she performs after the coach has left the scene.
- How leaders feel about their own progress. It must be judged on the changes stakeholders perceive.
- The leader's positive feelings toward, and relationship with, the coach—a natural byproduct of a successful coaching engagement. True success is measured by demonstrated results.

Involving Key Stakeholders

The following coaching model has been developed by Marshall Goldsmith, called America's foremost executive coach by the business press. This coaching process has had considerable results among some of the most successful CEOs.

The coach will ask key people involved in the leader's performance to participate in the coaching process, requesting direct help in four critical arenas:

1. **Let go of the past.** Key stakeholders must agree to focus on a future that can improve, as opposed to a past that cannot.
2. **Be helpful and supportive - not cynical, sarcastic or judgmental.** If people don't give the leader a chance, he or she will stop trying.
3. **Tell the truth.** Key stakeholders are advised not to gloss over or embellish reports.
4. **Choose an area for self-improvement.** The leader must be very open about what he or she is going to change. As part of the process, he/she will ask for ongoing suggestions. Stakeholders, too, will be asked to select an area for self-improvement and to solicit suggestions. This makes the process a two-way street.

Steps in the Behavioral Coaching Process

Research indicates that if leaders fail to complete these basic steps, they probably will not improve:

1. Allow leaders to be involved in determining desired behaviors.
2. Let leaders assist in identifying key stakeholders.
3. The coach will collect feedback by interviewing key stakeholders and using 360-degree rating systems.
4. Determine key behaviors for change. Select only one or two key behaviors that will have the most positive impact on effective leadership.
5. Have the leader respond to key stakeholders. The leader should talk with each key stakeholder to collect additional suggestions on how to improve in the targeted areas.
6. Review what has been learned, and help the leader develop an action plan. After listening to suggestions, the leader must return with a plan describing what he or she wants to accomplish. The coach then provides

encouragement.

7. Develop an ongoing follow-up process. Follow-up should be very efficient and focused on the future, incorporating questions like, "*Based upon my behavior last month, what ideas do you have for me for next month?*" Within six months, conduct a two- to six-item mini-survey with key stakeholders, asking whether the leader has become more or less effective in each targeted area for improvement.
8. Review results and start again. If the leader has taken the process seriously, stakeholders invariably report improvement. Build on this success by repeating the process for the next 12 to 18 months

Why Leaders Give Up

When it comes to change, some leaders lose motivation and fail to "stick with the program." Regardless of a coach's competence, failure to achieve goals may occur for several reasons:

1. **Ownership:** The more leaders feel the process is being imposed upon them or that they are just casually "trying it out," the less likely the coaching process will work.
2. **Time:** Goal setters have a natural tendency to underestimate the time needed to reach targets.
3. **Difficulty:** Goal setters' optimism applies to difficulty, as well. Not only does everything take longer than we think, it also requires hard work!
4. **Distractions:** Leaders have a tendency to underestimate the distractions and competing goals that will invariably surface in any given year. By planning for distractions in advance, leaders can set realistic expectations for change and, consequently, will be less likely to renounce the change process.
5. **Rewards:** Leaders tend to become disappointed when achievement of one goal doesn't immediately translate into achievement of other goals. If leaders think skills improvement will quickly lead to short-term profits, promotions or recognition, they may become disappointed and give up when these things fail to materialize instantaneously.
6. **Maintenance:** Once a leader has put forth the effort required to achieve a goal, it can be tough to maintain behaviors that incorporate the new changes. Leaders must recognize that professional development is an ongoing process, with a lifelong commitment.

Resource: Goldsmith, M., Lyons, L. & Freas, A. eds. *Coaching for Leadership: How the World's Greatest Coaches Help Leaders Learn*. Jossey Bass/Pfeiffer. San Francisco, CA.

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