

## IS COACHING ANOTHER FAD?

Does it seem to you that the word coaching surpassed *empowerment* as THE word of the late 90s? The number of articles about coaching, and references to it in the media are incredible. And, how about the number of training organizations who are publicizing their programs, claiming to "certify" individuals to be coaches?

The reality is, coaching became popular because companies realized they needed employees who could think on their own, act independently, transfer knowledge from one situation to another, and thrive in dynamic environments. These organizations recognized that one-size-fits-all training doesn't work, and rarely accomplishes the needs described above.

I don't think coaching is another fad. Why? First, coaching is customized learning which affects short-term performance and long-term success. It has staying power because it works. Metrics like earnings per share and employee turnover rates, and softer measures like employee satisfaction, show that companies using coaching as a development tool, consistently outperform peers in their industries.

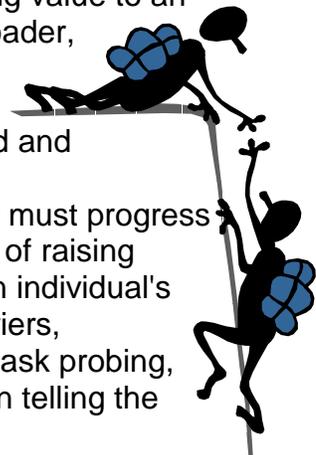
Another reason that coaching is popular, and likely to remain so, is that it has been so thoroughly embraced by major organizations. These are the firms who set trends for the rest of us. In fact, a review of Fortune Magazine's January 1999 edition showcasing the *100 Best Companies to Work For*, demonstrated that 60 of the 100 have coaching/mentoring programs.

Usually, the coaching described in the media is executive coaching. So what is executive coaching? In my experience, there are four essential elements:

- It is private intervention with senior leaders,
- It is individual, customized learning in order to achieve business results,
- It is linked to business strategy,
- It addresses personal issues that impede business effectiveness.

High quality executive coaching can add significant far-reaching value to an organization. And, creating a coaching culture can have even broader, positive results on business success. First and foremost, a coaching culture is intent on creating an organization of adults, not on perpetuating paternalistic relationships or the old command and control model of managing that existed for years.

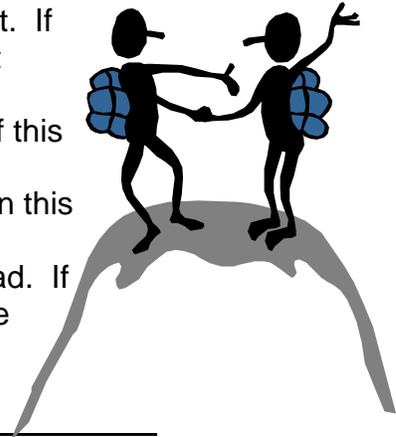
Managers have key roles in creating a coaching culture. They must progress from an instructional mode where solutions are given, to a stance of raising awareness in employees. This is accomplished by questioning an individual's goals and issues, and listening to descriptions of reality (e.g., barriers, restraints, possibilities, and options). The manager must learn to ask probing, open-ended questions and offer succinct observations, rather than telling the person what to do.



The manager as coach, or a specially designated coach from inside or outside the company, and the employee being coached, must have a commitment to the change effort. They must see awareness as a growth activity. The relationship between coach and individual must be a partnership with each person sharing responsibility for the process. Further, this relationship must be founded on trust. For a person to be honest, and perhaps vulnerable, they must feel safe. Finally, for real change to occur, the impetus must come from within the employee, not imposed from the outside.

Moving to a coaching culture takes time and commitment. If you decide to create or encourage such a culture, know that resistance will be strong. Many will be confused and not understand the new model. Be sure there are champions of this new approach from many parts of the organization. Like all transformations, it is difficult. Make sure you are not alone in this important change effort.

In summary, coaching is not just another management fad. If effectively implemented, coaching will add measurable value for your business.



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