

Everybody Needs A Coach

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The latest buzz word in the business world is coaching. The word appears in business reviews, management books, in lectures, corporate brochures, and training sessions. But, the understanding of coaching and its benefits are not as clear and transparent as the apparent desire by managers and executives to use the approach. In fact, the skills required and the process of coaching are not necessarily new to people. However, what is new is the paradigm shift that is often necessary for people to 'be' coaches instead of just 'doing' it.

Potential clients often ask me, "how is coaching different from consulting, counseling, and other areas of people and executive development?" Some general definitions that you often hear are 'A process of discovery to help an individual (or group) reach their potential'. Unfortunately, this still leaves many potential clients or those interested in learning more about coaching confused. There are many books in the market and on websites expounding its virtues, but the answer to the question, 'what is coaching' is still not always very clear, especially to the skeptic. It is easy to say what coaching is not... it is not telling people what to do or how to do it, it is not emotional healing or psychotherapy, and it is not a direct transfer of knowledge or skills.

Imagine someone listening to every word you say and listening for every nuance behind your words. Imagine someone asking you questions that will help you towards solutions instead of pointing blame. Imagine a relationship where the focus is totally on you and the other person is only concerned about your success. Imagine a relationship with someone who will be totally honest with you and give you feedback about your strengths and also where you sell yourself short. These are the kinds of things you should expect from a coaching relationship and they are what make it so successful and different from other aspects of people development or counseling. Coaching is a forward moving process where the client chooses the focus, the coach asks powerful questions, provides objective feedback and helps the client to find themselves the most effective, long-term solutions.

Inherent in a coaching relationship is trust, commitment, mutual learning, risk and, perhaps of greater importance – belief. There must be belief from the coach that the client has the potential to achieve and succeed. Without this belief, the relationship and outcomes will always be limited.

But why could every manager/executive benefit from a coach? Because It Works! Over and over again, I hear this phrase from people who are experiencing coaching! So why is it successful? Because it is perhaps the only form of people development that is individually personalized, based on a relationship of utter trust, focused on action and goals, challenging and self focused.

Like most things, experience is what can really make a difference and help the understanding stick. For anyone who is curious about coaching, but not quite

sure if you want to invest in something that is still a relative unknown, I highly recommend asking a coach if he/she will give you a trial session. Most coaches will oblige. Coaching is still a new profession and the better it becomes known, the more it will be used.

So why else does every manager/executive need a coach? Because everybody has the ability to improve themselves and achieve results which might seem out of their reach. How can this be achieved? First of all, you have to be open to being coached. Then, you need someone who believes in you. Someone who gives you the encouragement and faith to succeed. Secondly, you need someone who will challenge you, challenge your self-limiting thoughts, challenge your decisions and your assumptions. Thirdly, you need someone to help you find the solutions yourself so that you are committed, responsible and clear about what you need to do, when you need to act and how you will achieve the results. So why do you need a coach if the answers come from yourself? Because we are humans and humans do not always see our self-defining assumptions or the endless options that exist. In fact we usually see things from a limited perspective and an experienced coach can facilitate a process that allows the client to expand those perspectives and become clear about how to find the answers.

Who are the people hiring coaches?

In fact, coaches are being hired in and out of the workforce. Supervisors, managers and senior executives are the most common to be hiring coaches within organizations. As people are promoted into people management positions, they often find that they are not prepared for the different and changing demands of having responsibility for the development and growth of their people in addition to their results. In these situations a coach can offer an individual or a team the support and guidance to achieve their goals and greater. Executive coaching relationships are usually recommended to begin with a minimum of 6 months commitment with the frequency of meeting dependant on the client situation.

Outside of the workforce coaches are being hired to support people through difficult transitions, career changes, for spiritual growth and also for self development. Personal or Life coaches usually begin with a minimum of 3 months commitment.

It is important to remember that the client should not become dependant on the coach. A coaching relationship can in some cases continue over 1 year period but it is important to make sure that the client is learning how to solve his/her own problems in the future. The changes and development in coaching is meant to be sustainable and not fix-it solutions or answers.

How do you decide on a coach?

There are more and more coaches in the market nowadays and the coaching profession is becoming more formalized through organizations such as the International Coaching Federation (ICF), a virtual organization operating out of

the United States. Many coaches in the marketplace call themselves coaches but have never received official coach training. Coaching as a profession is still quite new and forming, so many coaches have been successful through personal references and using their experience as credentials. As the profession develops, I believe that there will be more of a need to receive official coach training or education and certification to even practice, just like a lawyer or psychologist needs.

Before hiring someone it is important to get an idea of the coach's experience, credentials, references and then it is critical to find someone who you trust and respect. Some people say that almost everyone is 'coachable' but not by every coach, so by all means, make sure you choose someone you are comfortable with because in order to achieve the fullest, you need to be honest with yourself and honest with your coach.

Most coaches will specialize in an area, such as executive / business / career / life / personal / spiritual coaching. So, first you would benefit from deciding what area would be of most interest for your development.