

## THE TROUBLE WITH COACHING

If you're a sports fan (or merely observant) you know the enduring influence a good coach can have on an athlete, from amateur to professional level and all the way to the Olympics. Coaches observe, counsel, guide, give feedback, and challenge athletes to perform their best, even under adverse circumstances. When all goes well, they celebrate together and then go back to work. When things don't go as planned, the coach is there to support, evaluate, revise the plan, challenge, and go back to the drawing board, if necessary.

As a speaker and business consultant since 1979, I find the prevalence of workplace and personal coaching a welcome trend. This may prompt you to wonder why I used the word "trouble" in the title of this piece. The trouble with coaching isn't in the coaching; it's the perception of coaching that's problematic.

First of all, coaching isn't new. It's a topic I've covered in my management programs since the late seventies. Coaching has always been a responsibility of managers and supervisors, but these specialized skills are difficult to learn and few managers have the time or resources to properly coach employees. Additionally, many people think coaching is reserved only for workers who are having problems and difficulties.

Not so, though you can expect an upsurge of workplace coaching over the next few months or year to help employees cope with the emotional fallout resulting from the cutbacks and layoffs connected to the economic meltdown. Sadly, the workers who most need the coaching are the ones who have lost their jobs, and their family members could probably use the support, as well.

Truth be told, coaching is an "equal opportunity" endeavor for people at any level, under any circumstance, good or bad, personal or professional, who wish to enhance their self-knowledge, personal skill base, and ability to make better decisions. Which takes us to the problem with coaching.

Some high-level managers think coaching is for anyone but them. Again, this is most definitely not so. Admittedly, someone who is accustomed to being in charge may feel a bit intimidated or embarrassed to work with a coach. But even though I'm not a certified coach, I consider executive coaching smart business.

Where else can a leader receive honest, candid, objective, ongoing feedback from a single, consistent source: one who doesn't have to consider politics, second guess ego concerns, or obsess over future advancement? Where else can an executive have a safe sounding board

while receiving specific, confidential feedback? No, the trouble with coaching isn't in the coaching itself, but in the way some of us perceive it.

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