

Chapter 1

Why Coach Leaders?

Leaders have powerful impacts on their organizations. Their words and deeds affect all the people around them. The power implicit in their role causes people to look to them for direction. Everything they say becomes amplified as if spoken through a microphone. Their accomplishments as well as their missteps are exaggerated in the eyes of others.

Their actions affect people and the organization in a variety of ways. They provide vision and strategic direction, which can lead the organization down successful or ruinous paths. They maintain important relationships with members, which

To the Reader: Addressing the Personal Pronoun Problem

Since the 1970s, when our society embraced feminism, writers have grappled with the dilemma of the third-person pronoun. None of the choices are ideal. Using “he” is the old-fashioned, but sexist choice. Using “she” alone is progressive, but misleading and self-conscious. Using “he or she” or “he/she” is more gender neutral, but awkward. I have settled on “they” or “their” throughout the text to refer to individuals. This breaks the grammatical rule requiring consistency between singular and plural subjects. But it seems like the least of three evils. Although it may sound awkward at first, I expect the reader will become used to it.

can be inspiring, neutral, or demoralizing. They can stimulate learning and innovation or foster stagnant adherence to the status quo. They serve as moral exemplars who encourage either ethical or corrupt business practices. They serve as role models for many people who emulate their actions and attitudes, whatever they may be. Because of the tremendous impact inherent in leadership roles, investing in the development of leaders has a significant effect on an organization, its members, and the leaders themselves.

BENEFITS TO THE LEADER

Most leaders have risen to their position through some combination of managerial, interpersonal, and technical skills. As they moved up, they successfully adapted to each new role by studying their environment and applying their repertoire of skills. Yet there comes a point in the careers of most leaders when their repertoire and powers of observation don't quite fit their current challenge. Essentially, their old moves no longer work.

The old patterns don't work because the current challenge is significantly different from past challenges. Some typical situations calling for coaching include moving from a supervisory role to an executive role, specifically moving from managing doers to managing managers; moving into one's first management role; moving from a staff to a line position or vice versa; getting a new boss; needing to implement a new business strategy or a significant cultural change; managing during an organizational transition such as a merger or downsizing; and, more generally, whenever an old behavior pattern just isn't working in the current environment. Many leaders have tried to adapt to these new situations on their own, often with limited suc-

cess, when they or their bosses recognize that they need additional help.

The goal of coaching is to accelerate the leader's development. In some situations, a leader may eventually develop appropriate new behaviors through a combination of self-observation and trial and error. However, that might take years, years that neither the leader nor the organization has to spare. Coaching speeds learning time, enabling leaders to make significant leaps in learning and behavior change in a matter of months rather than years.

Coaching also gives clients experience in self-development. As clients progress through the phases of change, they learn how to move from not recognizing the need for change (precontemplation)—to thinking about change (contemplation)—to preparation—to action—and to consolidation (see Chapter Five). They learn how to observe their behavior, recognize their impact, and reflect on and alter their underlying mental models. The self-development skills they learn through coaching become models for their continuing development throughout their careers.

Coaching brings hope and the possibility of change into people's lives. Clients recognize that significant change is possible. Engaging in personal change combats the routine and cynicism that can arise from working in a competitive, political workplace. It brings out the best in people by building a realistic optimism about what is possible.

BENEFITS TO THE COACH

Coaching can be a very rewarding profession. It appeals to people on at least four different fronts. First, it is a *people-oriented* profession that involves helping, teaching, and working closely

with others. It is also an *investigative* profession, in which the coach learns, analyzes, and experiments. It is a *creative* profession that involves seeing new connections and inventing things to say and do that will facilitate change. And it is an *enterprising* profession, in which the coach leads, influences, and facilitates clients' success in the world of commerce.

In the people-oriented sphere, the coach helps individuals grow as human beings. Like other helping professions, coaching requires a close involvement with people. With each assignment, the coach embarks on an intimate adventure in which they explore their clients' outer and inner worlds related to work. The coach becomes immersed in the client's world, getting to know the client well enough to form opinions about how they might navigate their way through their present challenge. The coach becomes a close adviser and professional friend, at an appropriate professional distance. The coach helps clients make significant changes at important moments in their lives. For people who are energized by helping, coaching can be a thrilling profession.

Coaches also help make the world a better place in which to work. People spend almost half their waking hours working. If they work with a wise and skillful leader in a supportive environment, this time can be exciting and rewarding. If they work for a weak or abusive leader in a punishing environment, the workday can be frustrating and painful. A world full of competent leaders would make for both more fulfilling lives and a more flourishing economy.

Coaching *focuses on learning*. As a new profession, it has roots in several of the social sciences, including organizational, clinical, and cognitive-behavioral psychology; learning theory; organizational management; social anthropology; and even neu-

rosience. As an applied science, it offers opportunities to experiment, analyze, and learn. Coaches can draw on fitting theoretical foundations in developing their own approaches. Coaches also learn about their clients' business in order to form accurate impressions of the business drivers and organizational culture. Because coaching requires continual learning in a variety of disciplines, it is a very exciting profession for people who like to learn.

The goal of coaching as an enterprising profession is facilitating behavior change that leads to both the client's and the coach's success. The practice involves a good deal of influencing, both the coach influencing the client and the client influencing stakeholders. Coaching also focuses on results, both concrete behavioral change by the client and the client's discernible impact on stakeholders. Coaching can measure results to ascertain the client's degree of change. For people who are energized by influencing people and achieving visible results, coaching can be a very satisfying profession.

DANGERS OF COACHING—TO THE COACH

Facilitating change also has a dark side. Coaches dig into the problems that are challenging their clients, problems such as experiencing the frustration of misunderstandings with higher-ups or tensions with employees who are angry with them or the disappointment of not getting an expected promotion. The coach is close enough to empathize with the client's pain and removed enough to view it from a different perspective and to turn problems into opportunities. In many cases, the coach intensifies the client's pain but then helps the client use it to motivate change. The coach guides the client in working

through the difficulty, and together they arrive at a new place. Crossing troubled waters can be both tense and interesting. Safely reaching the other shore can be exhilarating.

One risk for the coach is developing an inflated ego. The nature of the client's change can be so enormous that people may ascribe the success to the coach rather than the client. After all, the client acted one way before the coach arrived and is now acting very differently. Why, the coach must be a genius, right? Not at all—don't forget, it's the client who is doing the changing. Like an athletic coach, the leadership coach stays on the sidelines making observations and offering suggestions. The client is on the playing field, taking risks and managing the enterprise. If the coach develops a self-perception more as a savior than as a skillful facilitator, bad can things happen. The coach may become arrogant and focus less on the client or miss or undervalue the client's observations and ideas. Clients can be put off by the arrogance and withdraw or may begin to feel alone in their struggle. Worse, they can fall under the charismatic spell of the coach and continue working together out of a sense of obedience and admiration rather than out of their own belief in themselves. For these reasons, it is important for coaches to keep their egos in check and keep their engagements focused on their clients.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A GOOD COACH?

First and foremost, good coaches are good listeners. They listen with a curiosity about how their clients operate. They are particularly skillful at tuning in to people—at understanding what they do well and what they avoid or do not do well. They also listen closely to understand their clients' thoughts, emo-

tions, and values. They use this information to forge a collaborative partnership with clients, and to build on these characteristics to facilitate the clients' growth.

Coaches are both focused and flexible. They are able to create a working relationship that is both structured enough to maintain a focus on goals and flexible enough to invent new behaviors. They match their style and pace to their clients to achieve rapport. They explore seeming tangents that might hold clues to change. And they stay attuned to the goals, always ready to bring the conversation back to the objectives.

Coaches ask good questions, questions that explore the most salient topics. Their questions are rooted in an exploration of the client's psychology and a focus on the goals of the engagement. The resulting questions yield information that moves the client forward.

Coaches are also teachers, adult educators who expand the client's worldview by respectfully introducing new knowledge. They build a common language with the client by adapting the psychology of leadership to this client and their environment. They can translate broad goals into specific behaviors and enlist the client in learning these behaviors. Like an actor, they can model new behaviors and rehearse until the client has mastered them.

Coaches know psychology. They use this knowledge to determine where and when to focus their efforts with each client—when to focus on behavior, when to focus on thinking, when to focus on emotion, and when to focus on impact. They can move smoothly from one aspect to another as they guide the client through behavior change.

Coaches are relationship builders. They earn trust and

credibility through their words and actions. They build rapport by tuning in to people and talking their language. They encourage opening up by modeling openness themselves. They inspire courage by addressing difficult topics with tact and sensitivity. They challenge just enough for clients to leave their comfort zone and enter the flow of self-development but not so much that they become overwhelmed or shut down. They use their relationship to foster their client's growth.

Coaches also understand leadership and organizational politics. They use this understanding to interpret the client's situation and to suggest development strategies. They are familiar with different approaches to managing people and leading organizations. They compare the client's actual practices to ideal ones in order to identify learning opportunities. They have mental models for team behavior and for managing up, and they use these models to seek to learning opportunities. They understand the cultural and political norms in the client's organization, especially the ways that people seek to influence and protect turf. They use this understanding to help clients become more effective leaders.