

Coaching in its Right Place

Data on trends in development of the next generation of leaders shows that high-potential employees are not necessarily motivated by money; they want continuous development, to be challenged, stand at the cutting edge and hold a competitive market position. Retention becomes the top priority.

To retain these achievers they must be helped to build relationships, to network with business teams and be capable of cross-functionality in the business.

Leadership development must be done at every level of the organisation to have outstanding leadership, identifying high-potential people at every level. Seventy-five percent of company CEO's surveyed indicated that employee development and learning was the critical factor in a company's success, in comparison with other identified people issues (source: Nancy DeViney, General Manager, IBM Learning Solutions).

Problems with the boss are the primary reason employees seek work elsewhere. These are generally managers, supervisors, team leaders and project leaders. It makes sense to improve their leadership skills.

It is common for senior management to be operating with middle-management values. They must be helped to raise their values and therefore what they exhibit to their staff. They must learn to deal with change, to work 'on the business', not 'in the business'.

LEADERSHIP BEGINS WITH SELF

Leaders I work with have recently said, 'We know what we do is not working, but we don't know how else to be.' This moment of conscious incompetency immediately opens them to learning a new structure for having a more effective approach to leadership and management – the coaching conversation.

Unfortunately, these same managers can be reluctant to have a personal coach. They want to coach their teams and be greater leaders yet show a reluctance to engage in ongoing exploration of their own personal motivations and behaviours. True commitment to personal transformation and therefore lasting cultural change goes missing. In essence the master-student relationship is boycotted because the master is not willing to achieve self-mastery. So what can the student truly learn from their leader?

EMBRACING A COACHING CULTURE

Clearly this is not a top-down approach to cultural change. In one major corporation I work with it's the middle band where the true change could happen because work is being done on improving self-awareness, revealing individual motivations and moving towards more constructive behaviours. The concern is that it will fail to change the whole culture in a lasting, positive way because the understanding and behaviours behind the shifts are not embraced from the top. One mismatch is replaced with another. And poor employee engagement scores will continue to emerge.

COACHING THE VISIONARIES

In a high-performance innovative team there are no experts – it hasn't been done before. Collective genius is the key to inventive solutions: create urgency and use their intellect. 'What are we going to look like and how are we going to get there?' is the motivating question.

Collaboration is their means to dealing with change. Risk equals reward for them and *is* the motivation.

An external coach will achieve greater tread with these people than an internal one because they can be tougher on skills and stay outside the internal politics of the organisation. Results can be gained quickly. At this level, it's akin to the essential relationship between coach and olympiad.

As a consulting Executive Coach, I've seen high-achievers who were struggling with personal dilemmas and low motivation levels find a new connection with their purpose and rapidly create high-performing teams - while engaged in a personal coaching program. New drive and enthusiasm was released and a genuine focus established. Risking failure in a stressful results-oriented environment once again became exciting.

Without authentic support and personal challenge, high-achievers wither, grow resentful and seek greener pastures elsewhere - causing major talent loss for the organisation.

FILITERING DOWN

An interesting statement to keep in mind when considering the benefits of coaching is, 'If you need a boss to perform your role you are too expensive for this company'.

At lower levels of management, coaching becomes a powerful tool for developing individual competencies and capabilities in ways that encourage greater self-determination in the role, accepting responsibility, and the ability to make effective decisions and act on them appropriately. Coaching becomes the cultural approach to solution-finding and people development. Leaders are set free from micro-management and burnout.

At this level, internal skills coaches can be assigned to teams, with external coaches backing up the coaches, leaders and learning processes. These internal coaches must be able to mentor people in their roles and so must have broad knowledge of the business processes. Of course the success of this approach hinges on the leaders' abilities to practise self-assessment and grow, beyond their own comfort zones.

It is quite common now for large organisations to create a panel of 'preferred' coaches from which the organisation can draw. This can be extremely useful as the coaches can service a broad spectrum of staff nationally and even act as an internal business service. The down-side can be that this becomes a bureaucratic selection process that takes time and perhaps mismatches coach and coachee. Meanwhile momentum is lost.

FOLLOWING THROUGH

The organisation itself must define what it wants in a leader to fit culturally and coach towards these characteristics. It is not reasonable to say, 'We don't support this kind of behaviour any more,' without defining and communicating the new, desired behaviours. Once 360 degree behaviour assessments or similar are conducted, it is important to support this awareness with the ability to make lasting change. Much money is spent on preparing these reports yet this is quite often where it all stops. Rather than leave the employee to nervously attempt new behaviours, employing a coaching approach at this time can bring support to personal transformation that is very welcome.

As Marilyn Vos Savant said, 'Success is achieved by development of our strengths, not by elimination of our weaknesses.'

REVEAL REAL MOTIVATIONS

Employees who are willing to invest their energy and build a career versus a 'job' will be retained if they are offered financial reward **and** learning opportunities. It is not enough to impose a mission from the top and expect staff to embrace it with unquestioning gusto. There has to be a reason to 'buy in'. And that will always be a personal one. Coaching can help to successfully link these personal desires for growth and contribution with the needs of the corporate mission.

In a recent set of team development workshops I conducted, one team leader was shocked to find how many diverse motivators ranked highly for the twenty-five individuals on his team. He wondered why his team had been hard to bring together. Now he had his answer. And he was challenged as to how he would address these very diverse influencers and gain greater engagement at work. He decided he needed to have a coaching conversation with each of them so that they could map out a more meaningful performance plan. He had been trained in a coaching model before the teams were brought to these workshops so he had a way forward in light of these revelations. And he had me and his coaching peers to support him in navigating his way forward.

CONNECT LEARNING TO BUSINESS

How does learning strategically add value to the business? People must be helped to learn and perform their roles interdependently with teams and across networks of expertise. The best leaders are excellent at connecting learning strategies with business strategies. Coaching provides on-the-spot learning that is responsive to these business needs, giving flexibility, relevance and focus.

Investing in coaching people in skills around job roles, relationship building, networking and team development at all levels of an organisation can produce much higher level results. And the skills are more likely to be retained through loyal employees who are inspired to contribute much of themselves as self-actualising individuals.

In its right place, coaching is a powerful communication tool for creating a humanistic environment where modern leadership and business can flourish amid rapid and certain change.

By Indira Kennedy, Executive Coach and Director of Conscious Leadership.

12 COACHING ESSENTIALS FOR LEADERS

Cultivate a coaching mindset – GROW your people

Trust you have enough time to coach

Create a compelling vision

Find out what really motivates your team

Solution-find don't problem-solve

Assess when to direct, guide, motivate or delegate

Ask don't tell – encourage creative answers

Stretch beyond the comfort zone

Practise self-mastery - question yourself often

Insist on OAR – Ownership, Acceptance and Responsibility

Buy time by creating buy-in

Turn awareness into action – support new behaviours into new habits

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