
Coaching: A Relationship of Commitment and Trust

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Coaching has become an integral component of the development of executive leadership. No longer is it a service available to a chosen few close to the pinnacle of their careers. Now coaching is an acknowledged need for rising managers and executives and its many benefits are obvious. But the dynamic between client and coach is one that requires constant maintenance on both parts.

The first and most obvious analogy for executive coaching is that of a sports coach. Anyone who has ever played on a team or individual sport knows the intense relationship of coach and athlete. Except in the earliest stages of skill development in a sport, the athlete comes to the coach with a set of skills and a body of knowledge already in place. He or she also comes with expectations about the coach's skill set. In their early encounters each must demonstrate something more than skill; each must persuade the other that they are committed to the process and to each other.

A coach cannot compel an athlete to dedicate him or herself to a regimen of improvement. The athlete needs to bring that dedication to the process. The athlete cannot compel the coach to accommodate the personal characteristics of the athlete. The coach must bring that readiness to the relationship. Somehow the mix of personalities, quirks, capabilities and motivation must merge into a working relationship that constantly moves forward and gets results. Tricky? Someone described it as tinkering with the aerodynamics of an airplane while it is in flight.

The relationship of coach and client in an organizational setting is both similar to and different from the coach/athlete scenario. All the personal relationship requirements are similar – each personality must find a way to work effectively with the other. Trust is essential but trust takes time to develop. What is required is a plan that demonstrates skills and commitment on both parts. Coaching in an organization always begins in-situ. That being the case the first steps should incorporate elements of ongoing projects or situations into the coaching process.

As the coach demonstrates understanding, knowledge and experience in discussions of ongoing projects or situations, the client begins to develop trust in the judgment of the coach. With that confidence the level of performance and satisfaction improves.

The coach/client relationship is up close and personal, that is its strength and its weakness. To be productive it must be a relationship of trust, especially in the commitment of one another to the relationship. Coaching is usually not a short-term project, except in specialized areas in which a particular skill needs honing and its application is circumscribed. But when the relationship works and the trust is maintained, coaching can have a substantial and consequential impact on individual and organizational performance.

About the Author: Reginald Winston, CEO and founder of RJ Winston Consulting, Inc. has 25+ years' experience in Organizational Development with a focus on Executive Coaching & Training, Team Building, Group Facilitation and Conflict Management. Before consulting, Mr. Winston held positions in numerous large organizations including Ameritech, SBC, Motorola, Advocate Health Care, Corning Consumer Products and the Federal Reserve. In addition, Mr. Winston's service in the US Marine Corps and assignments with the United States Department of State gives him a unique insight in the challenges management teams & leaders face in the expanding global world market. Mr. Winston has extensive experience in working with Hospital Administrators and Senior Medical staff (doctors, nurses and executive-level hospital administrators) in a wide variety of hospital settings and departments. Mr. Winston holds a Master of Science Degree in Organization Development (MSOD) from Loyola University, in Chicago, Illinois.