

Using Coaching Skills to Lead

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As the profession of coaching grows, so does the need for the use of coaching skills by those who lead in organizations, communities and life. Recognizing that all leaders will not desire coach certification or in-depth training, the authors believe teaching coaching skills to improve efficiencies and conversations is a necessity. Toward this cause, as Executive Coaches, the authors teach coaching skills to leaders as a part of the Emerging Leaders Coaching Experience as well as using the InDiCom Coaching Model from the book, *Coaching for Commitment*, to students in the Master's of Organizational Leadership at Columbus State University in Columbus, GA. Research shows the use of internal and external coaches brings value to organizations. If the process of coaching is valued, then the authors believe the use of coaching skills should be used by all leaders and not just those who are certified or credentialed as a life profession.

Successful coaching is a conversation of self-discovery that follows a logical process and leads to superior performance, commitment to sustained growth, and positive relationships” (Coe, Zehnder and Kinlaw, 2008, p. 8).

Coaching has become a broad term since the inception of the International Coach Federation in early 1990. While organizations may recognize the value of coaching, those who invest into coaching services may be limited compared to the potential benefits associated with coaching. One constant motive for employing coaches is to enhance behavior and self-awareness for the purpose of improved business and interpersonal success.

Why is Coaching Important?

The Executive Coaching Survey, produced by Sherpa Coaching in Cincinnati, Ohio, has conducted twelve years of market research with coaches, authors, educators, and researchers to help us understand the use of coaches and the measurement of success.

In the 2017 Survey, they found the value of coaching to be firmly established due to the maturing of the industry. The authors state, “coaching started trending from mediocre to very high 10 years ago, and quickly leveled off. For eight straight years:

Over 90% of respondents rated the value of coaching as somewhat or very high.

From 2011-2014 it was over 95%. We stopped asking the question because the answer was clear (Executive Coaching Survey, 2017 p. 10, Retrieved from Sherpa Coaching online).

It can be useful to identify positive and negative trends of coaching benefits. A consistent finding is that coaching skills are effective at developing others and creating dialogue that is authentic and rooted in discovery. If coaching skills are valuable to an organization, the compelling question is how to incorporate coaching skills as an essential part of leadership development, using it as an alternative to hiring internal or external coaches for all desired development.

Teaching Coaching Skills to Leaders

In organizations, coaching skills make the biggest impact when those in leadership effectively shift from the roles of Manager, Instructor, or Mentor to one who uses coaching skills, regardless of a role or title. Far too often, we see strong and capable individuals promoted from within because of their success in current roles. At times, promotions send the message that, “since you did this job well, you will lead people well.” Without proper leadership development, and the authors feel this must include coaching skills, we may see great employees now manage from a place of doing more of what they did earlier rather than maximizing the individual talents of people whom they lead. Coaching skills is a tool that allows anyone to be a better leader because they are able to appreciate and benefit from allowing others to provide input from their perspective without a manager telling or executing from a place of management.

Teaching Coaching Skills in a Learning Institution

The concept of using coaching to lead others was the driving reason to include coach training in the Servant Leadership Masters Degree program at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia. Because employee engagement and high effectiveness are results of using coaching, it made sense to include it in servant leadership as coaching always comes from a place of the person being coached (PBC) knowing themselves best and servant leadership leads from a place of respect and preference for others.

For several years, the curriculum offered 42 hours toward coach certification that meant students would leave the program with more than half the educational hours required by The International Coach Federation to make application for an ICF credential. While the training taught in-depth

coaching skills and prepared one to become a certified coach, the application did not match the need of most students. Of 40 students, two continued training and became certified coaches. The significance of the training program, however, should not be lost in the numbers of only two certified coaches. Feedback from the majority of students, anecdotally as well as in the official evaluations, rates this class as one of the favorites and most valued in the Master's of Organizational Leadership program.

This feedback led the authors to explore a program that could be shifted to meet the broad range of students who desired to be effective servant leaders and saw the value of using coaching skills. Their varied professions and interests offered a unique opportunity to expand coaching into their world rather than certifying students as coaches. Being passionate about the benefits of coaching and hearing examples of how students were using coaching skills personally and professionally, the authors created a curriculum, *The Leader As Coach*, as a part of the Masters of Organizational Leadership program under the Servant Leadership track. The focus is to train students to incorporate the art of coaching skills into their daily interactions. While the InDiCom system – *Involve – Discover - Commit* – is the process described in the book *Coaching For Commitment*, the authors built other components into the curriculum to round out the benefit of coaching. Some of these include:

- An Overview of Coaching as a Profession
- A Comparison of Coaching, Counseling, Mentoring and Consulting
- ICF Core Competencies & Sherpa Data
- Coaching Skills Inventory (an assessment to measure current coaching skills given early and late in the semester)
- Coaching Skills: Trust, Listening, Biases, Powerful Questions, Values, Process, GROW Model, Saboteurs
- Guest Lectures & Guest Coaching Sessions (2)
- Peer Coaching
- Coaching Presentations

The authors found it most helpful to strategically teach coaching skills as a part of a broader concept of leading through serving. While coaching skills serve others through keen listening, questioning and accountability, the authors believe there has to be a heart of service to motivate toward each conversation being one where we believe the best about the person being coached. If we, as leaders, apply the principles of servant leadership, coaching becomes a natural flow of listening and asking the best question with an intention of supporting the other person in a complete way. The curriculum carries this theme throughout every class.

An essential element of developing sharp coaching skills is practice. It is expected each student will coach a peer outside of class for a minimum of 5 hours as well as experiencing at least 8 hours of in-class coaching. Consistent feedback tells us one of the favorite components of the class is the opportunity to coach guests. On two different occasions, volunteers bring a topic unknown to the student and the student uses coaching skills to help the move forward toward their goals in individual sessions. This is the best application of coaching skills in a real-world setting as it is spontaneous and requires the student to draw from skills without the benefit of preparation or

familiarity. The timing between the two sessions allows the student to coach around accountability and success.

Measuring Outcomes

A misperception is that certified coaches in certain settings can only use coaching. We found when coaching skills are learned and executed efficiently; any one in any setting can use coaching for more effective conversations. Students who have participated in this class range from profit, non-profit and Captains in the Army. Emphasis is placed on the motivation for using coaching skills as opposed to simply asking questions. Listening to be fully engaged and believing the best about each person being coached (PBC) helps to develop a more relational approach to conversation, even if the conversation is not an official coaching session. We teach that anyone in any role can shift the dialogue by using coaching skills with an authentic appreciation that each person holds answers that can contribute to success.

As a part of measuring outcomes, each student completes the Coaching Skills Inventory (CSI) (Coe, Zehnder, and Kinlaw 2008) (Appendix A) at the beginning of the semester and at the end. The Inventory assesses a student's current skills in the following areas:

- Manager
- Instructor
- Mentor

Once a student is aware of how they lead in conversation, it is easier to apply coaching skills to move the desired state of Coach.

Results consistently show the students improving so by the end of the semester when they retake the Inventory, we see the majority of students making the shift to that of Coach. This means they have learned and are apply the coaching skills of:

- Involve
- Discovery
- Commit

(Coe, Zehnder, and Kinlaw, 2008).

In the most recent class of 29 students, Table 1 documents the shift. While we would love to see everyone move further to the column of coach, we recognize 80% of the class are officers in the Army and while coaching skills can be valuable in this setting, certain scenarios will require different types of leadership. With that in mind, even these students grew in their skills and consistently report back that it is possible to use coaching skills even in what many may perceive to be a directive profession.

Beginning of Semester			
Manager 8	Instructor 5	Mentor 9	Coach 1
End of Semester			
Manager 4	Instructor 3	Mentor 11	Coach 6

Anecdotal feedback from previous students through the years further confirm the expectation of using powerful listening skills and asking the next best curious question facilitates learning and employee engagement. Many former students return to share their positive experiences with current students. Implementing the use of coaching skills within an organization is effective and more cost effective as an alternative to hiring outside coaches.

Experiential Learning

Outside of the master’s classroom, teaching coaching skills to managers at two different College of Nursing programs demonstrated the value of coaching when working to improve communication and effectiveness. The Director and her leadership team went through coach training and began using the skills with other faculty and students. Positive results began to surface very quickly as faculty began to use coaching to work together on projects and other initiatives. Two key faculty members, who previously were unable to communicate effectively, surprisingly reported back to share their conversations changed and each felt heard and understood. Their work showed a positive shift not only in the results, but also in the manner in which they communicated and treated each other.

This example is one of many that demonstrate why the authors believe coaching skills is one of the most valuable components of effective work groups. It creates space for each person who uses coaching skills to better listen to verbal and non-verbal communication and uses questions to clarify and seek out a deeper revelation and create forward moving action in a positive way. The result is people feel heard, understood and taken seriously, and success is achieved in a more powerful way.

Emotional Intelligence speaks to the four elements of being emotionally mature. They are: *Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness and Social (Relational) Management*. It is likely that a person who develops and regularly uses coaching skills will also increase emotional intelligence as a product of becoming a better communicator through the process.

Conclusion

Recognizing the value and success of internal and external coaches has created an acute awareness that all leaders can use coaching skills in daily interactions to demonstrate better success toward goals and personal growth. Our commitment is to continue to offer coaching skills to every leader to improve conversations. Susan Scott (2002) powerfully states, “While no single conversation is guaranteed to transform a company, a relationship, or a life, any single conversation can.” We believe in coaching and we believe any conversation that includes coaching skills can be that single conversation that can make the shift to greatness.

About the Authors

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