

Coaching – fashionable and necessary

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Today's performance-oriented corporate culture puts exceptionally high pressure on employees who are overloaded and subject to burnout, especially those at managerial levels. Such people are unable to deliver continuously high-quality performance. The recent finding that managers often do not utilize the potential of their subordinates is particularly worrying. They are weak in their ability to coach effectively.

The survey "Trends in Human Capital Management 2013," one of the major surveys conducted by Deloitte, covered 59 countries and focused on mapping the opinions of HR managers and 1,300 business leaders. The survey reveals that firms suffer from a major lack of competent managers. As many as 55% of leaders indicated that the weak leadership skills of their executives is one of the three biggest barriers to their companies' growth. The survey also showed that companies are now investing more funds into education than since 2008.

These reasons, and the findings that group trainings are not very effective (at most 5%), have led small and medium-sized companies to adopt a coaching culture that has resulted in the rapidly increased market demand for skilled coaches and quality managerial trainings.

Despite the fact that coaching has been known for 80 years, since John Whitmore, recognized as one of its pioneers, first adapted this approach to sport, coaching remains a relatively new managerial discipline. It is furthermore associated with another attribute, that coaching is modern and is becoming massive. But this is not necessarily only a positive thing. It is important to know how to mix the cocktail of its success.

The coaching process can be lengthy. The experience of managers accustomed to fast working dynamics and being results-focused leads to the conclusion in the survey that not everybody likes this approach. A lot also depends on the degree of "compatibility" between the manager and his/her coach, and which level of confidentiality and openness can be achieved. External coaching is also more costly per person compared to group training. Demand leads to the sad reality that while many may claim to be a coach, few have the appropriate training. Such a coach, business-person and amateur can spoil a lot, and people who really need a solution can be disappointed. Obviously, all this leads to the question: "When and how to start coaching, if the coaching should make sense and not be a waste of money and time?"

Practical examples vary. The good intentions of a CEO leading a successful production company failed due to a fatal error – that coaching, as a means to improve, was given to managers by command. However, motivation or confidence is not accomplished by command, so the outcome was lousy. Then the CEO listened to the advice of an experienced coach and changed the approach, leaving managers themselves to define areas of their development and the manner of implementation. One of the options was coaching, and

they could choose their coach. There are other reasons why coaching is not successful. One example is from a telecommunications company that introduced an internal coaching culture through trained, but only in-house coaches. How efficient can coaching be when issues brought by an employee to the coach – actually a colleague – are a mixture of business and personal issues? The issues may or may not be related, but trust can become an issue when at some point they may meet on the stairs and know a lot about the other, including issues that would be best forgotten. Sometimes the coaching relationship is a tricky thing.

Another such example is from a small HR-consulting firm that embraced the theme of coaching head-on, and within six months everyone began to coach one another. In a small company the structure is flat, and the observation quickly arose that the boss, who is also the coach, could not maintain distance, objectivity, and confidentiality and lead to a change.

In either case, it was very questionable what level of trust and open communication was established, and since this is the core of the approach's success, efficiency was poor. Both firms finally decided to give each employee the option to choose a coach from a group comprising of

both internal and external coaches that had been carefully selected by employees.

The problem of timing and the desire of the coachee to achieve results as soon as possible can also be resolved. The degree of personal maturity, experience, and the adaptability of the coach can influence the process and sometimes using directive coaching is absolutely appropriate. Some, especially analytical managers, require such a coach. The most effective situation is when the coach does not strictly follow the rules of methodology and structure, but can apply the principle of coaching with immediate results i.e. the coach also enters into the process as a mentor. Then the coachee leaves with his/her own action plan on paper, and the date of the next session, and the deadline by which the tasks must be fulfilled.

An example of how coaching can lose its efficiency can also be seen from one foreign bank in which this principle was introduced three years ago. Coaching sessions were becoming more popular, internal coaches were strong altruists, and sessions were taking place only during working hours. Eventually, the HR department found out that the coaching sessions were not far from psychological counselling, with employees seeking advice purely about their personal problems. Somehow, everything had gotten out of hand. HR changed its approach and became more outcome-focused.



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