

“The Essence of Leadership Coaching”

I thought in these articles I'd explore how using someone like myself - a trained leadership coach – can help you improve your performance.

I'll be making reference to a book “Coaching For Performance” written by John Whitmore which may also serve to illustrate the point that coaching is not merely a technique, it's a way of managing and a way of treating people.

Whitmore in his book advocates coaching as a management tool, but states that coaching is much more than that: it is “unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.”

He likens individuals to acorns which contain all the potential to be magnificent oak trees. “We need nourishment, encouragement and the light to reach towards, but the oakreeness is already within.”

This different view of individuals requires that managers suspend their limiting beliefs, discard old habits and ways of thinking, and adapt their style to get the best from people.

When we explore traditional management styles, we could say that coaching lies on a different plane altogether, combining the benefits of both ends of the spectrum with the risks of neither i.e. the boss knows what is going on and the employee chooses to take responsibility.

This is important when the pace of change is increasing and the driving forces for change are coming not only from business, but from employees themselves, who want more involvement and responsibility, less stress and an end to the blame culture at work.

I wholeheartedly agree with Whitmore, that **the essence of coaching** is in **raising awareness** and **offering individuals the choice of accepting responsibility** (as “telling someone does not make them feel responsible”).

Whitmore backs this up with research undertaken for David Hemery's book “Sporting Excellence” which found that awareness and responsibility are the two most important attitudinal factors common to great performers, along with the state of mind of the performer.

Coaching advocates questioning as the best way to tackle the issues of awareness and responsibility. This is because questions optimise the individual's uniqueness and do not try to mould the person to your opinion or to best practice.

Therefore, **effective questions are at the heart of coaching**, as they require attention for an answer, they focus attention for precision, and they create a feedback loop for the coach.

A popular coaching model explores what to ask questions about and in what sequence to ask them. The GROW model which I often use myself is about asking questions in the following sequence:

- **G**oal setting
- **R**eality checking
- Looking at **O**ptions, and action planning - What, When, by Whom
- The **W**ill to do it.

However it must be remembered that GROW without the context of awareness and responsibility, and the skill of questioning to generate them, has little value! That's why using a trained coach is so important, or at the very least someone who's been trained in coaching techniques.

In my next article we'll take a detailed look at each of the steps in the GROW model and at the questions that best raise awareness and responsibility within each step.

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About The Author:

Julie Johnson, formerly a manager and development specialist, created The Leadership Coaching Company to help managers solve one of their biggest business problems: how to get the most from themselves and their staff. She is now a leadership success specialist and has attracted a loyal following who praise her down to earth yet inspiring approach.

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