

Of What Value is Coaching to an Organization?

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2010, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on Saturday, May 15, 2010

My prediction is that you will either skip over this article or you'll become intrigued. I'm hoping you'll be motivated to learn more about coaching, the emerging service that helps individuals move from where they are to where they want to be.

If executives and top athletes have personal coaches, could a competent coach help you move in the direction of your desired future state? Here's an account, shared last week at the fifth annual Prism Award conference in Atlanta, describing the benefit one informal leader attributes to skilled coaching.

A hard-charging, highly skilled technician was discouraged, frustrated with his failed attempts to improve his operation. His manager and the other line technicians consistently rejected his suggestions.

After participating in a newly introduced coaching activity, he realized that his own behavior had been the real obstacle blocking his success. Within days, he apologized to several key people for his past disruptive interactions and promised his future cooperation.

His follow-through was so consistent with his stated intentions that others, impressed with his transformation, wanted to know how they could enroll in the coaching program.

Encouraged to apply his unique skills, this individual says he now feels great coming to work. He's eliminated the stresses he had inadvertently generated. In addition to enhanced respect in the plant, his newly found empowerment has improved his relationships away from work.

Similar testimonials were offered by each of the twelve finalists at the Southeast Prism Award conference held last week in Atlanta. Awards for linking coaching with tangible business results were presented in three categories.

The non-profit recognition went to the Veterans Health Administration, representing three regions of the southeast. Individuals who have recent experience with the VHA are typically astounded at the quality of care and service they receive. The leaders attribute the change to using external coaches who have trained and qualified internal coaches.

The award for a small business went to the Westervelt Company, a privately owned land and wood products company headquartered in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, employing 525 individuals. Their coaching program is a significant contribution to their leadership development process.

The award for a large business went to the Lockheed Martin Corporation. The company has 140,000 employees across 46 states and 500 cities. Their coaching effort began seven years ago with the senior vice-presidents and has spread to a thousand coaching engagements focused on leader development. The challenge now is in preparing and certifying enough coaches to meet the rapidly increasing demand.

Each of the award recipients presented the business challenge they faced when they began their coaching efforts. They shared the relevance of coaching in addressing those challenges. They described the achievements and success measures used in confirming that coaching was a major contributor to the organization's improved results.

Interestingly, an early speaker described "the return on investment paradox." Most organizations understandably want to know in advance what return to expect on the time and money they'll be investing in agreeing to start a coaching process.

Subsequent speakers confirmed that once the improved personal performance and hard-number results became evident, the conversation about requiring a return on investment disappeared. Representatives said their organizations now maintain waiting lists of new individuals who want to be assigned to a coach for skill development and greater personal effectiveness.

With 225 members, the Georgia Coach Association, sponsor of the Southeast Prism Award conference, is the fifth largest regional chapter of the International Coach Federation (ICF). The Georgia chapter was founded in 1998, three years after the ICF was established. Both the ICF and the Georgia chapter offer a "Find a Coach" service on their internet sites.

As I drove home after the conference, I lamented that the most important participant was missing. If YOU had been there, you would have asked your challenging questions of individuals whose organizations are seeing the immediate benefits of coaching.

To sign up for advanced notices for next year's conference, visit www.southeastprismconference.com.

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