

Why Coaching Works

by Dennis Hooper; copyright © 2002, published in the Houston Home Journal on July 23, 2002

When leaders experience the challenge and support of an effective executive coach, they usually undergo a major growth spurt, their self-awareness expands, their imagination and creativity intensify, and their willingness and ability to serve their direct reports springboards to a new level.

Coaching releases the “free agent” and entrepreneur inside each of us. In the late 1990s, the FranklinCovey Institute conducted research regarding the success of leaders putting into practice new concepts they had learned. After reading a book, only 3% reported putting the concepts into practice. After a group training session, 10% reported successful application. After group training and support from a competent coach, 80% reported significant progress!

Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, “Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor.” An effective coach helps a leader grow from his or her current level of performance to a far more effective competency. But why does coaching work so well? Here are three reasons.

Productively engaging the brain. We humans think continuously. (Have you ever tried to sit idly for ten minutes thinking about nothing? It’s quite difficult!) We only verbalize a small percentage of our thoughts. However, the discipline of processing thoughts through the cerebrum--doing the mental work necessary to assign words to our ideas--gives those concepts life and strength they otherwise would not have. Communication with a coach requires the leader to verbalize and clarify desires and intentions. Supportive, enhancing thoughts usually follow, which stimulates action!

Further, by articulating your thoughts, you program the reticular activating system, a bundle of specialized nerve cells in your medulla oblongata (through which your sense-organ nerves flow). This powerful “filter” brings to your conscious awareness opportunities that are consistent with your articulated vision and goals. These creative ideas and actions might otherwise slip past you. This filtering functions all the time, but most of us aren’t even aware it exists. With coaching, you enable the reticular activating system to operate in a more intentional, focused way.

The power of personalized attention. The relationship between a coach and a client is a special one. An effective coach creates a safe environment, where you, the leader, are free to explore. Doubts and insecurities are shared with no fear of recrimination or judgment. A competent coach eventually turns your attention toward possibilities and options, encouraging you to choose bite-sized steps that are achievable and will lead toward your desired future state.

Won’t a good friend do this just as well? Yes, maybe. An effective coach is like a friend (and often becomes one). Friend relationships, however, require both individuals to give approximately equal amounts of time and attention to listening to and supporting the other’s needs. In a coaching relationship, that burden is lifted. The coach focuses entirely on exploring and meeting your (the client’s) needs. We humans respond amazingly well to that kind of focused attention!

Unreliable human intentions. Few people make promises to themselves and consistently keep them. We have good intentions, but our casual commitments--and even our explicit “to-do” lists--are often hollow. Your coach pushes back on empty intentions and holds you accountable for the commitments you make. Most people are more likely to follow through on their growth commitments if they know that they will soon be facing their coach. Your coach will expect a report on your successes as well as your obstacles, failed attempts, and other disappointments.

Coaching works! We humans have an innate desire to improve, learn, find a sense of purpose, and succeed. Coaching is not teaching, but the process does help a person learn. Coaching does not hand out universal principles that guarantee success. However, the questions and focus that a coach brings raise awareness of what can work for and what is possible for the client.

In holding the leader accountable for that awareness, the coach contributes mightily to the enhanced application of the client’s God-given talents. Consider contacting a coach today!