

Encouraging Those You Influence to Reflect

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At the beginning of each of my coaching conversations, I ask my clients to share with me any insights or paradigm shifts that have occurred since we last talked. Some of my clients take to this habit immediately and look forward to sharing their new awareness.

A few of my clients, however, stumble when I ask the question. They're not yet committed to looking for new insights, though the opportunity for fresh understanding presents itself several times a day.

We human beings are definitely creatures of habit. New situations come at us continually, and we handle them in stride. We typically respond with whatever has habitually worked in the past.

However, operating from habit limits our ability to improve. Improvement comes from considering "What could I do differently?" And that consideration will occur only if you call "time out" momentarily and reflect on what just happened (or on what is continuing to unfold before you).

Rather than rapidly cruising through every situation, I suggest you slow down, thoughtfully pausing to reflect on what you might learn. Acknowledge new insights when they occur. Why? Thinking about the meaning of an incident when it occurs anchors the new awareness in your memory.

Describing the insightful experience several days later to someone who cares about your growth reinforces the value of the new perspective. You typically are able to examine the situation in a developmental way. Allow your friend or colleague to celebrate with you the joy of your discovery.

I have that privilege of celebration frequently. It's not unusual that in the middle of recounting the circumstances that occurred, a person will pause and exclaim with excitement some new realization that just presented itself. We both rejoice--and then we think together about how we can apply the new concept to other areas of our lives.

Coaching helps individuals build their leadership skills. The bigger deliverable, however, is the increased awareness that they gain. It's easier to predict what growth will occur in the skills area than in the insights area. Clearly, those who tune up their awareness antennae gain much.

Allow me to suggest that you start asking those you influence, "What insights and paradigm shifts have you experienced since we last talked?"

Don't be surprised at the reactions when you first pop this question. The person you ask may not understand the question. It is such an unusual inquiry in our society. The presumption is that we all know everything we need to know to succeed at our responsibilities.

That may be true for your direct reports in the area of their functional and technical skills. However, understanding themselves and understanding the people they contact is quite a different ball game. We all have so much to learn about how others respond to us (and how we respond to them).

Anyone wanting to intentionally improve their contributions (and I think that should be a desire of every leader) must build in time to reflect. I encourage individuals to ask themselves frequently, "What am I doing well?" and "What could I do better in the future?"

Serve as a role model to those you influence. Share your insights and paradigm shifts with your teammates. Make the personal disclosure of growthful awareness a norm in your organization. You'll reap many benefits in your culture, processes, and ultimately the results you seek to generate.

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