

Serving as a Leadership Coach

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You may be receiving some pressure in your organization to be a “coach” to those under your authority. Business magazines proclaim that you should be a coach to those who look to you for direction.

Maybe you feel you are already doing everything you can to help your organization be successful. Or maybe you recall your school experiences with a demanding athletic coach who pushed you to do more and be more—and vowed never to be like that.

In the business world, if you push people too much, you run the risk of them choosing to resign and go work somewhere else. So the concept of an athletic coach has some limitations when you bring the metaphor into the workplace.

Further, leadership isn't about pushing people. They have to be nurtured as allies, agreeing that whatever you want is something they also want. They require that you care about them as individuals. They want to see value for themselves in what they are doing for you and the organization.

I prefer the image of one of those large fancy horse-drawn coaches often shown in movies about the early twentieth century. Those coaches took you from where you were to where you wanted to go. That's what a coach in today's organization should be doing.

Most people want to grow. Most have aspirations to do well and be rewarded with more pay and greater responsibility. Most have dreams and goals they want to achieve. The best organizations are those that link the needs and desires of each individual to the required work.

A coach helps individuals clarify and articulate their ambitions. A coach helps generate options for moving in that direction. A coach helps the individual evaluate options based upon their personal values and the probability of each opportunity moving them closer to their vision of future success.

A coach is someone who helps them imagine new experiences and holds them accountable for actually putting into practice what they've conceived.

Notice that the coach is not the decision-maker in any of the above. The coach is merely creating the environment in which the individual makes the decisions, prepares to execute them, and evaluates their own success.

So, what's expected if you serve as a *leadership* coach? It depends on what level of skill you possess as a leader. Do you remember in school studying the system of “guilds” that developed during medieval times? There were specifically defined levels of artisanship within each craft.

A beginner was called a “novice.” An “apprentice” spent several years learning the basics of the craft, receiving only food, clothing, and a place to live. A “journeyman” produced salable materials and was paid a small wage while continuing to build competence, perhaps helping a novice learn basic skills.

An “expert” oversaw the work of apprentices and journeymen, providing feedback and teaching more sophisticated techniques. There were few “masters,” individuals so skilled as to advance the art and science to new levels.

Although the terms are not typically used these days, at what level would you place your leadership skill? Are you able to help the novices and apprentices formulate their vision about “what could be”?

Your organization's future leaders will either be hired from the outside, or you'll grow them internally. What do you require to make yourself a better coach to your establishment's future leaders?

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