

Why Would a Leader Need a Coach?—Part 2

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Last week's article presented four points from a teleconference I led a couple of weeks ago. The final four points are covered today.

To see last week's article, go to my website (address at the end of the article) and click on "Dennis' Blog." To listen to a recording of the conference, go to www.christiancoaches.com and click on "Why Leaders Need Coaching" in the upper right-hand corner.

Enhanced awareness. As a leader, you believe that what you see is the truth. (I could say that about any of us.) Yet what you "see" is heavily influenced by your history, your values, your self-image, your expectations, etc. Your many biases cause you to "see the world not as it is, but as you are." That observation was recorded by Anais Nin, a French journalist.

A coach can ask questions that cause you to challenge your existing perspectives, examine your underlying assumptions, and clarify your unarticulated expectations. In his 2003 book *The Next Generation Leader*, Andy Stanley wrote, "Age and experience have a tendency to leave us in a rut, doing the same thing the same way."

A coach teaches you to listen deeply to how others see the world, to have compassion and patience, and to hold onto your perspectives loosely. Your coach's service includes helping you be more comfortable and open in welcoming paradigm shifts and new insights.

Confidence vs. competence. Imagine the perspective of individuals who work with you. Which would they rate higher, your actual abilities or your confidence in those abilities? Despite what many individuals might speculate, usually one (either one) is stronger than the other.

You've probably known leaders who were very confident but just didn't seem to be able to do the job. You've probably also known individuals who were capable of handling just about any situation, but they were quiet, tended to hold back, and sidestepped new opportunities.

Even these extreme individuals may not recognize the imbalance in their skills and poise. A coach, on the other hand, can help you identify your strengths and limitations. Your coach's agenda is to help you move from where you are now to where you want to be.

My experience is that working to improve either confidence or competence tends to naturally enhance both. The result is typically a more effective leader!

Serving those under your authority. Sometimes a potential client will ask, "Do you ever provide guidance on 'servant leadership'?" I usually chuckle and explain that in my opinion, servant leadership is the only kind of influence and authority that is truly effective!

You've probably known some leaders who "lord it over" those under their authority. Their outlook is that "these people work for me." The most effective leaders, however, see their roles as serving the individuals who produce the products and services that satisfy the organization's paying customers.

How might you serve your employees? Here are a few examples. You provide opportunity, resources, and clear direction. You listen a lot. You offer encouragement, consistency, and obstacle removal.

Your coach can help you understand and prioritize your employees' perspectives and needs in ways you aren't even able to imagine on your own.

Leadership is more than functional/technical skills. Every new employee who comes to work in your organization has to learn some functional or technical skill in order to be considered an acceptable contributor. The most productive of those employees are often promoted to leadership positions.

Yet aptitude as a leader goes way beyond functional competence. To be effective, leaders need healthy relationships, and learning interpersonal skills is very different from learning technical skills.

Without extensive support and accountability, most individuals won't have the motivation, willingness to experiment, and the hunger for feedback required to learn leadership skills. Your coach, however, can provide that framework for you probably more consistently than your boss. Why? Your supervisor just doesn't have the time to focus on your development like a coach can.

And what if you are THE boss? What if you've led your company for the past twenty years? You have no boss--who's going to help you improve?

Take a look at Andy Stanley's answer offered in the book mentioned earlier, *The Next Generation Leader*. He devotes three full chapters to advocating having a coach. "You will never maximize your potential in any area without coaching. It is impossible. You may be good. You may even be better than everyone else. But without outside input, you will never be as good as you could be....Coaching enables a leader to go farther, faster."