

Why Coaching Works

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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. Last week, I shared some interesting statistics comparing the growth of individuals after reading a book, attending training, and working with a good coach. Growth is possible from all of these, of course, but stunning results are often reported when a competent coach provides personal challenge and support.

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 very 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 thoughts--gives those ideas strength and life they otherwise would not have. Communication with a coach requires the leader to verbalize and clarify concepts, desires, and intentions. Supportive, enhancing thoughts usually follow, stimulating 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, creative ideas, and actions that would 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 client is a very 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? Maybe--an effective coach is very much 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 the other’s needs. In a coaching relationship, that burden is lifted. The entire time is spent 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. A coach pushes back on empty intentions and holds a client accountable for the commitments he or she makes. Most people are more likely to follow through on their growth commitments if they know that they will be facing their coach in a few days, reporting on their successes--and their obstacles, failed attempts, and other disappointments.

Coaching works! We humans have an innate desire to improve, to learn, to find a sense of purpose, and to 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 a coach brings raises awareness of what works 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!