



The essence of being a coach

After igniting an aspiration within you, the coach begins to equip you with tools to achieve them

By K Jayshankar



Shane Warne's dismissive comment that a coach is something you use to travel to the ground and back has often been quoted to denigrate the role played by a cricket coach. Be that as it may, the question needs to be asked whether coaching can be meaningfully used as a developmental tool in business organisations today.

While there are various kinds of coaching like life, sports and personal coaching, business or executive coaching is emerging as a new area for organisational development today.

A coach is not a psychoanalyst and given to the pressures of today's business world, coupled with the limited skills of many managers, organisations are now seeking an external viewpoint because it usually brings lateral ideas without the baggage associated with the present organisation.

While it has been variously defined, in essence, coaching involves a structured dialogue (coaching conversation) focused on helping the manager achieve his developmental goal. On the face of it, this may appear to involve a little more than holding an animated conversation but in the hands of a good coach the underlying base of the conversation is all about the manager's career and how it stretches beyond today, well into the past and the future.

Essentially, the coach becomes valuable as he helps you set better goals and achieve them faster. After igniting an aspiration within you, the coach begins to equip you with tools to achieve them.

He enables you to break free from limitations. The wear and tear of the daily grind often compels you to limit your horizons. A good coach can challenge you to take radical steps in your life both personal and professional, thereby fulfilling your potential.

He becomes a collaborative partner. In a competitive environment, colleagues tend to be judgmental whereas a coach's skills lie in being your sounding board to enable you to resonate better with yourself and thereby achieve greater success.

There are some distinct principles that one needs to keep in mind to perform the role of a coach. John Buchanan, the Aussie cricket coach known for his radical coaching theories, in his book, 'If Better Is Possible', mentions that the underlying principles of coaching are relationships and continual improvement. While commenting that today's managers do not invest enough time in building relationships with their people, Buchanan observes that relationships are developed by knowing the person, thereby moving from a personal to continual improvement. This indicates the two key skills that a good coach requires are motivating and empathetic listening. A coach not only hears your words but is perceptively listening to the emotions behind the words. Consequently, by helping you stay focused, the coach knows which buttons to press to bring forth the best in you. It is not sweet talk alone that works with everybody, the coach also knows when to challenge you with a rap on your knuckles if complacency sets in and you rest on your laurels too easily. In the words of Ram Charan, the outstanding business coach, 'Coaching is very personal. You're hitting the person between the eyes. You're helping him face his blind sides and learn to do things better. The feedback has to be honest and direct. No sugar coating.'

Another angle is the fact that the knowledge and experience that a coach possesses enables him to offer you strategies that you may have overlooked.

Only the best appreciate that to become better you need external inputs. Capgemini famously ran an advertisement featuring Darren Cahill, who coached Andre Agassi, which mentions that his job was to help Agassi get results. The message is vivid: success is feasible through a true transformation that requires collaborative effort. Being too close to the action, it is easy to miss the woods for the trees and it takes a coach to take a helicopter view, both in times of anguish (after a loss) as well as elation (after a hard fought victory). Truly, 'a good coach will make his players see what they can be rather than what they are.'

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