

Newsletter: Bringing the Inside Out

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Coaching: A Coach May Improve Your Game

This article was in the Los Angeles Times – October 11, 2006: The coach that was highlighted was also a graduate from the Coach Training Alliance, the same institution that certified Coach Leslie Adams.

“Experts can help entrepreneurs look at the big picture, set goals and create strategies.

Cindy Schreier visited a playground with her son last year and ran into a coach who convinced the entrepreneur that she could improve her performance.

Coach Michelle Payne wasn't talking about fine-tuning Schreier's backhand. Payne is a business coach, and she meant to help the owner of Prima Environmental, a Sacramento testing lab, win at the high-stakes game of small business.

It was February 2005 and Schreier's growing company had so much work testing contaminated soils for environmental consultants that she was having trouble keeping track of it all, even with the addition of her first full-time employee, a chemist. Her office overflowed with paper. She was worried about money and unsure how well the company was faring.

"The business was running me; I wasn't running it," Schreier said.

She had never heard of a business coach until she met Payne by chance at the park where their children played. She just knew she needed help.

Schreier was so impressed with Payne's comments during the coach's first visit to the firm that she hired her on the spot. In the following months, Schreier made changes that improved the bottom line at the company she started in 1998 and expanded in 2003.

She created checklists and a log to track important communications with her chemist. She filed paperwork and learned how simple steps, such as keeping a pad near her phone for taking notes during client calls, could be the foundation

for an organized workflow. And she hired an administrative assistant.

At the end of the year, the company's annual revenue was up 60% at \$320,000.

'Working with a coach gives you the opportunity to discuss issues and brainstorm, and that can open up new doors," said Payne, executive vice president at Beyond Point B.'

Business coaches have become popular, particularly among small-business owners who are often overwhelmed trying to juggle multiple roles. Unlike management consultants, who usually have specific types of business expertise and are trained to offer solutions, business coaches tend to help their clients look at the big picture — a view that often includes their personal and professional lives — and draw conclusions.

Coaches help clients set goals and establish the steps they must take to achieve them. They also hold their clients accountable for achieving the results they want, usually through weekly discussions in person or over the phone.

The technique works well for individuals who are motivated to make changes and are willing to do the necessary work."

Coaching can be an effective way for a busy small-business owner to step back and determine whether the company is being run in line with the owner's values and priorities. It also can help owners rethink those priorities."

Levels of Listening

Listening effectively is difficult because people vary in their communication skills and in how clearly they express themselves, and often have different needs, wants and purposes for interacting.

As a listener we attend to the level that we think is most important. Failing to recognize the level most relevant and important to the speaker can lead to a kind of crossed wires where the two people are not on the same wavelength. The purpose of the contact and the nature of our relationship with the person will usually determine what level or levels are appropriate and important for the particular interaction. Note the different requirements in the following situations:

- You're lost, and you ask a stranger for directions.
- Your child comes to your crying.
- You are in trouble and someone offers to help.
- Your spouse is being affectionate and playful.
- Opposing council is cross-examining you in court.

If the appropriate elements are not addressed the communication will not be effective and can actually deteriorate the situation. For example if your spouse is telling you about his or her hurt feelings and you focus on the facts of the situation and don't acknowledge her feelings, he or she will likely become more upset, not less.

There is a real distinction between merely hearing the words and really listening for the message. When we listen effectively we understand what the person is thinking and/or feeling from the other person's own perspective. It is as if we were standing in the other person's shoes, seeing through his/her eyes and listening through the person's ears. Our own viewpoint may be different and we may not necessarily agree with the person, but as we listen, we understand from the other's perspective. To listen effectively, we must be actively involved in the communication process, and not just listening passively.

We all act and respond on the basis of our understanding, and too often there is a misunderstanding that neither of us is aware of. With active listening, if a misunderstanding has occurred, it will be known immediately, and the communication can be clarified before any further misunderstanding occurs.

Several other possible benefits occur with active listening:

- Sometimes a person just needs to be heard and acknowledged before the person is willing to consider an alternative or soften his or her position.
- It is often easier for a person to listen to and consider the other's position when that person knows the other is listening and considering his or her position.
- It helps people to spot the flaws in their reasoning when they hear it played back without criticism.
- It also helps identify areas of agreement (win-win)
- Reflecting back what we hear each other say helps give each a chance to become aware of the different levels that are going on below the surface. This can help to bring things into the open where they can actually be resolved.
- If we accurately understand each other's view we can be more effective in discovering the flaws in each of our positions.

Become a more effective listener. Practice active listening techniques as your communication skills.

Tips: 11 Ways to be a Great Boss:

1. I am present and I pay attention
2. I am respectful (and never speak negatively or gossip about another employee or a customer)

3. I trust my employees to do the right thing
4. I trust them to have common sense
5. I ask for their opinions and listen carefully to them
6. I understand that they are interested in the good of the whole company
7. I support their growth by having high expectations for them and then I inspire them to live up to those expectations.
8. I invite them to use their strengths and stretch
9. I give them feedback in a number of ways:
 - a) I show my confidence both verbally and behaviourally
 - b) I behave in a way that communicates to them that I think they have the "right stuff"
10. I keep information flowing
11. I honour who they are

Quotes to Live By

“He who would learn to fly one day must first learn to stand and walk and run and climb and dance; one cannot fly into flying.”
Friedrich Nietzsche