

Most top sportsmen have a coach, why don't you?

by Nigel Buxton

Executive Coaching is about realizing potential.

Most of the top sportspeople have a coach, so it should not sound strange that executives too have coaches. Having a coach is healthy because it shows that the person wants to be and to do his best.

This one-to one relationship with the coach, is it just another modern name for bringing a psychoanalyst in to help the boss, or is the consultant sneaking in under a new name. Actually neither. The coach is not engaged as a healer or to look at what makes the leader tick (or not tick); nor to invent projects to resolve problems. The coach helps to bring out what is already there. The business leader knows the answers that are right for him: he does not need other people's answers, he just needs support to find and clarify his own answers. Let's have a look at what the coach specifically offers:-

Shouldering the weight

The coach is at the service of the leader to help him/her to bring out their best. The General Manager, or President is the loneliest position in the company. It is difficult inside the company, or with members of official bodies like the Supervisory Board, to just brainstorm or sound out new ideas with no agenda. Often though it is necessary to articulate ideas in order to clarify thoughts and to think them through to the end. The coach provides a neutral sounding-board in a safe environment for experimenting and developing ideas. He may throw in a new perspective, "have you thought about this as an alternative ...?" Decision-making is improved with coaching: there is a more thorough exploration of the alternatives and greater level of conviction that the right solution has been found.

The loneliness also comes from the responsibility. One feels isolated because the weight on the world is on the shoulders! Handling the responsibility of the job is a significant issue for the man at the top. This arises because the leader is not doing all the things he would like to do to improve the business. Why, because there is no time: and why is there no time? Because the leader is reacting to all kinds of fires in the company that he has no time to do what he believes he should be doing. When you are not in control of the situation, the responsibility weighs

heavier! The leader needs to create his agenda of what is important and stay focused. Together with the coach goals will be established, and week by week the progress towards those goals will be monitored. More results less stress.

Goal!

The coach will help you see greater possibilities. This is where you can get real leverage from having a coach. When you set goals with your coach you will have your feet on the ground: the goals must be achievable. But, as you are setting your goals you will talk about your resources and abilities, you will find with the encouragement of the coach that you are not the victim of your normally self-imposed limitations.

One of the categories who are natural clients for coaching are inventors/innovators and just young enthusiastic entrepreneurs. Often starting off with a relatively small company, the businessman needs someone to talk to. There are a lot of ideas which need to be focused. Goals need to be set and coordinated mapping the path systematically towards the vision. With the coach the entrepreneur can talk through ideas and goals to help clarify the issues and give the right importance to the various steps.

Everything is communication

In coaching you develop awareness as to how you communicate; and you will relax into being yourself. Today one of the principal competences required of the leader is communication skills. Everything that the leader does is communicating, by example, to his people. This is why to have an easy, don't-need-to-think-about-it style, is all important. It is ok to be human - to be yourself: to be angry when things go wrong (not at someone, but at the behaviour of the person), to make mistakes (be careful because you will have to take the responsibility for them), to be ecstatic when great things are done.

Your own style

During coaching you become more self-confident as you learn to trust your intuition (what is right for you) and to be your unique self. It is a process of allowing your style to come out rather than developing it. Living your own style, which you feel comfortable with, is an important part of being on top of the job. It means that you can handle difficult situations with employees and journalists (for example) without getting

overabsorbed in the drama. It means that you have created a climate and environment around you that moves in the direction that you have planned. Being comfortable with yourself comes from doing what is natural for you.

It is true that every leader should have a good dose of coach in him. But a leader full of self-doubt will teach his people self-doubt. A leader who questions how good he is will have difficulty competing in the top league. It is also true that in order to be good at something you need practice and a coach to help you bring out your own "good" style or technique. It is worthwhile for each leader to consider whether he feels comfortable enough with his own style to coach his people in the company.

All you need is

Each leader knows for himself if there is an area in his self which, if worked upon, would have a significant impact on his overall effectiveness – it might be, for example: conflict resolution, leadership skills or building teams. He might go to a coach to address such issues. It might be that he just wants to perform at his best while being at ease with himself.

The most successful businesspeople acknowledge that their real success is through handling the human resources. So success is built on people skills. The person that the leader needs to understand best is himself/herself. Knowing what is good for you is an excellent start to handling personnel. Understanding what the drivers to your motivation are will help you recognize the right treatment to get your people to perform extraordinarily.

The leader will create for himself a model (business/life) that is absolutely clear, that works and that he feels totally comfortable with. When the leader has this model he will need then strong communication skills, he will need a strategy (where he wants to go: how to get there: and the ability to make it happen) and he will need to establish goals. Strategy and goals setting must first be personal characteristics, before they will be part of the corporate culture (leadership by example).

Being coached is all about working on yourself: the successful leader is not just one or two leadership traits, there are many characteristics that combine to make each of us unique. One can go on for a lifetime

exploring and understanding human nature and how to operate more effectively as an individual and as a company.

It is not easy to say everyone is a coach

Coaching maybe little known in Slovenia today, but it offers an effective investment in people to make them more productive, more competitive, more self-assured. An important second step of coaching leaders is to train them to be coaches to their own people in the company. Coaching needs to get into the fibre of the company culture, and it must start at the top.

How many bosses can say that they actively coach their subordinates; and how many bosses can say that they are consciously interested in helping their subordinates to realize their potential? To be a coach requires one to be actively interested in the other person. The leader who coaches has understood that the future of the company is in the people. If the people do not move with the times, the company will just go down-hill. It is no longer good enough to keep doing a job within the standard time, there has to be constant improvement.

Managing versus coaching

Many leaders naturally delegate, manage projects and absorb the increased responsibility as their career progresses. They may also realize that they can do more (more of what they like doing) if they train up people to do more complex work and to take on more responsibility. Under this model you train people to do as much as they can do and to take on as much responsibility as they can handle. Coaching goes beyond this training. When someone comes against a self-imposed limitation, the coach will help to overcome it. The winning strategy comes from the belief, "I have no limits" - this way anything becomes possible. In coaching self-esteem is strengthened through creating challenges and achieving.

Why use a coach?

We all know the answers to all our questions: we all know why we are frustrated and stressed: we all know what we want to do: we all know what is creating problems for us, and so on. We believe we know, and it is true that we do know: BUT we cannot access those answers; we get drawn away from our plans; we cannot quite put the meat on our

skeleton plan; we have doubts about the action to be taken; we have resistance about doing unpleasant tasks.

The coach helps the leader to find the right answers for himself, to stay on track, to create the big picture in full colour, to feel comfortable about his decisions, to overcome his inhibitions. The leader feels more confident and relaxed because the trusted coach is available (by arrangement it can be 24 hours a day), maintaining total confidentiality, and he can see his performance is improving all the time.

The relationship between Coach and Client is customized but will involve regular meetings (normally weekly), telephone availability and, if required, e-mail exchanges. Coaching may be taken by a leader for a period of three months, maybe at the start of a position with new responsibilities, at one end of the scale; or it become for an indefinite period for someone who is interested in continuous development while working at the highest level.