

Put Me in, Coach; I'm Ready!

Coaching offers future-focused leaders an opportunity to give back to a profession they love and to a community of professional friends they respect and admire.

BY ALLAN WALKER

Successful leaders enjoy coaching. Even in hectic times, when doing more with less is the norm, visionary leaders still see coaching as a worthwhile opportunity to help employees grow as individuals and professionals. While monumentally busy, these leaders actively embrace the role of coach, likely drawing inspiration from a memorable individual who helped them on their journey up life's organizational chart.

COACHING CHARACTERISTICS AND TECHNIQUES

While everyone will not coach from the same step-by-step playbook, today's skillful coaches likely embrace a number of similar characteristics and techniques.

They have an eye for success. Time limitations dictate that it is impossible to dedicate the time required to coach everyone in a practice. While there may be a number of employees with various levels of desire and potential, the judicious leader is able to identify individuals who possess the untapped skills and motivation to grow and succeed in ways that will meet anticipated future practice needs.

They have a plan. Experienced coaches do not just “wing it.” They do not have time to muddle their way through a coaching program hoping to be successful. Rather, they have developed an ability to quickly and accurately connect the main pieces required for a successful coaching endeavor—matching the right candidate with the right growth opportunity—and then building a comprehensive and flexible plan that will reach the desired results in a timely manner.

They know what good looks like. Savvy coaches have a pretty good idea what they want the end result to be and are not shy about showing candidates “what good looks like” early in the process. It helps everyone if the coach is able to

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outline or point out where the coaching process is likely to take the participants. It is highly likely that a skillful coach will be able to demonstrate desired techniques, behaviors, and attitudes or discretely point them out in other staff members.

They are patient. Practiced coaches recognize that enduring training success is a long-term commitment requiring an elevated combination of patience, calm, steadfastness, and understanding. At times the process will run smoothly and much progress will be made. Yet, there will be bumps in the road and all parties need to regularly, openly, and honestly communicate so the coaching effort is not derailed.

They are demanding. Effective coaches insist that students work hard and show a high level of commitment and dedication. This is especially true in the beginning, when both sides are still determining if the partnership is right. Coaches must be diligent in identifying any early clues that might indicate a change of course is required. As the project progresses—and effort and commitment is repeatedly demonstrated—both parties will gain the confidence required to continue.

They believe in processes. Busy coaches are willing to take on mentoring assignments because they have processes in place that are tested, proven, and effective. They are prepared for the undertaking and know what works, even though each individual experience will be somewhat unique. Generally, experienced coaches employ a step-by-step approach built on the concept of explain-show-demonstrate-repeat. They also are usually adept at breaking down the overall project into manageable components to develop skills that can be learned separately and progressively. This allows for a manageable continuum of growth, which can advance in proper sequence and time.

They are inclusive. Visionary coaches welcome student-employees into every learning situation possible. Even if students are not yet at a developmental stage to totally comprehend what they are hearing/viewing/learning, many early-exposure opportunities will pay dividends later. Introducing students to what they eventually will learn/know is important to the process. This might include sitting in on high-level internal discussions and client encounters or traveling to regional or national professional meetings.

They are good communicators. Nothing ensures coaching success more than possessing advanced communication skills all across the board—verbal, nonverbal, listening, and written. The coaching process will afford participants many opportunities to misinterpret and stumble. Having well-honed communication skills will help minimize these obstacles and keep everyone on the right path. In fact, training students in the art of communication should be a staple in any coaching plan.

They see mistakes as learning opportunities. Mistakes cause stress and angst—not just in business, but in life, too. Smart coaches are quick to engage their damage-control skills and dress up a misstep as a chance to teach from a different direction. Frequently, mistakes afford a better learning opportunity because of the need to analyze why a mistake was made and how it could have been avoided or minimized. Frequently, coaches will use personal examples of how they learned from their mistakes.

They set up success moments. Good coaches see success coming and plan for it, frequently setting in motion a course of action that directly leads to a student reaching an established goal or gaining a desirable level of knowledge. There is nothing more rewarding than sharing “aha” moments that have both parties—coach and student—feeling good.

They know when to let go. Astute coaches know when a student is ready for increased responsibility and autonomy. They know when the time is right to turn certain things over to a student. As the student demonstrates s/he is ready to take the next step, experienced coaches quietly move out of the way. Yes, newly independent students will still make mistakes and face perplexing challenges, but they now will be forced to use their recent learning and experience to make “educated” decisions. And, that is exactly what a coach wants.

REWARDING EXPERIENCE

For established, future-focused leaders, coaching feels like the right thing to do. After reaching a recognized level of knowledge and experience, most see coaching as an opportunity to give back to a profession they love and to a community of professional friends they respect and admire. These leaders want to make sure their legacy includes preparing the next generation of thoughtful, well-trained coaches. ■

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