



Coaching Isn't Training

A few years ago, we wrote about the dangers and non-functionality of Inoculation Theory. A quick review reminds us that, too often, company leaders get caught in the belief that if they offer one session of training, the participants who completed it can be seen like patients who have received the latest serum for whatever ails them from their doctor. And if nothing ails them, then the training will ensure that they'll never need to be trained again.

It is not uncommon that the content and application of the programs we offer is often complex and esoteric. Just one "dose" of classroom training can serve, at best, as an introduction.

Another aspect of Inoculation Theory is found in who gets invited to the training. Sometimes, a manager will see one or two employees function in a worrisome way. So, he/she creates or seeks a classroom training experience that an entire department is enrolled in. As it turns out, the needy employees don't get truly focused content, and don't have the chance to practice and get helpful feedback. The seasoned employees, for whom it was deemed that the training wasn't necessary, are often frustrated and eager to get back to work.

Just like the wrong medication from the doctor, this type of training doesn't help. In fact, in this situation there is no need for training at all. What is needed here is coaching. When one or two employees need further development, a one-on-one focus with a competent coach will serve both the individual and the company as well.

When we can pair that struggling employee with a professional coach who can assess and treat the weak behavior or the next step in the employee's

development, we have a much greater likelihood of success. The employee often feels supported and appreciative of the company's effort.

Recently, we were in the initial stages of agreeing on a coaching assignment with a CEO. Throughout the discussion, he kept referring to the coaching as "training." Finally, we offered a couple of clarifying definitions.

Training traditionally is the process of adding something new to the trainees. It is something outside of them until the training makes it clearer, and then it is endorsed and added to the employee's skillset.

Coaching is the process of bringing out of the participant some new way of behaving or thinking about their work. We don't add "Leadership" to the participant from outside influences. We draw leadership out from inside the participant.

Coaching is very much a one-on-one experience conducted over time with specific goals and objectives that are created by the participant early in the process. The track record of success is very positive. Many of our coaching assignments result in extensions. It is also not uncommon, when the results become evident, that additional employees are eager to begin as well.

The art and science of performance improvement is not especially difficult to understand and embrace. Apparently, we all have a sense for noticing when we are being well treated. The whole realm of coaching development assures that trainees enter the discussion as experts, although they may not realize it at the onset.

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One added bonus of coaching tends to strengthen the relationship between coach and coachee. Often, the participant feels a sense of appreciation that the company cared enough about him or her to arrange for a coaching situation.

So, the name of the game in coaching is about revelation. The participant discovers how their own skills can be strengthened and utilized to reach their goals.

Recently, we established a coaching relationship with the number 2 manager in a manufacturing company. This participant had been with the company for several years, having moved upward, step by step. His boss explained that coaching was the best way to be ready for the number 1 slot, or at least to be able to stand in for the boss in the CEO's absence.

At the outset, the participant was very nervous about the coaching assignment. His education history was high school and a series of technical training programs. Once he attended his first coaching session, his nervousness was gone. He began to work on a set of developmental goals and the coach was able to provide specific guidance to help him achieve his plans.

The success of that assignment resulted in two other coaching assignments for two up and coming supervisors who were ready for the next level. Those assignments are current and there are two others waiting in the wings for coaching when the current coachees are finished.

It is clear that standard classroom training would not have produced those results. There are many great reasons for classroom training. But when the goal is specific developmental targets for individuals, coaching is the right medicine.

