



Knowing who to coach and who not to coach!

Learn to coach like Marshall Goldsmith! – Part 3

Why Assess Coachability?

If you have read Marshall's books or attended any of his conferences you might recall his stance on which leaders to coach. In his words: 'Have you ever successfully changed the behavior of an adult who did not really want to change? Chances are you were not successful! With coaching this is no different. The key to successfully coaching leaders is client selection. Coachability is key!'

Successful coaching engagements create significant impact for leaders and their organizations and the resulting testimonials are fantastic for building a coach's reputation and brand.

Anything less, on the other hand, is generally a waste of time and resources for all parties involved.

Being able to assess whether or not a leader is coachable i.e. committed to leadership growth is critical to building a successful coaching practice.

A great diet program only produces the promised results if the person is committed to following the program's steps. This holds true for any change process including managing change in leadership effectiveness through executive coaching.

When coaching works!

Leadership change is SIMPLE BUT NOT EASY. Leaders that have been successful in changing themselves and their teams to become more effective display the following crucial characteristics:

- **Courage - Have the courage to make it about YOU.** Leadership and change requires leaders to have the courage to address issues that are 'uncomfortable' and to try new things which may take them out of their comfort zone. This includes leaders involving their stakeholders and asking them for feedforward suggestions and using these to implement their action plan for change and growth.
- **Humility – Have the humility to make it not about YOU.** Real leadership is not about the leader but all about the team, the business and the organization. Leaders need to balance courage with humility and not let their ego get in the way of the change process. Leadership change is not just about the leader and certainly not about the coach. It is about the leader involving his/her stakeholders, listening to their suggestions and implementing relevant changes to improve their effectiveness and that of their team and organization.
- **Discipline:** Making leadership change stick is about creating more effective habits and processes. This requires disciplined execution of the 'implementation action plan' and consistent follow up with stakeholders. Stakeholders are an important part of this process as they are the experts as well as accountability partners. Being part of the business, stakeholders usually have a good sense of what it takes to improve effectiveness, and since their work with the leader can be on a daily or at least frequent basis, they are uniquely placed to hold the leader accountable.





When coaching doesn't work

Coaching and leadership programs fail to produce the desired results if any of the above 3 building blocks are not sufficiently part of the leader's commitment in the process. Our experience has shown that behavioral coaching is not successful in the following situations:

- **Lack of Commitment:** Stakeholder Centered Coaching will work only if the leader is willing to implement the process in a disciplined manner. Leaders need to understand that ultimately only they can make themselves better. Successful people tend to have a high need for self-determination. In other words, the more that leaders commit to coaching and behavior change because they believe in the process, the more the process is likely to work. The more they feel that the process is being imposed on them or that they are just casually "trying it out" - the less likely it is to work. Coaches and organizations that have the greatest success in helping leaders achieve long-term change have learned a great lesson - don't work with leaders who don't "buy in" to the coaching process.
- **Wrong Background:** If leaders lack the intelligence, experience, or functional skills to do their job, Stakeholder Centered Coaching will not help much. The focus of the coaching process is on improving leadership behavior.
- **Written-off:** Some large organizations "write people off". Rather than just fire them, they engage in a coaching process that is more "seek and destroy" than "help people get better". We only work with leaders that are seen by their organizations as high potentials and high performers and have a great future in the organization. We only work with people who will be given a fair chance by their management.
- **Ethics Problem:** Though psychologically possible, it is not likely that people with incorrect values, ethical problems or other systematic integrity violations can be coached successfully. A counseling approach might be more suitable in such cases.

Our coachability assessment which essentially evaluates "Readiness for Leadership Growth" has greatly contributed to our success. All our coaches assess coachability at the beginning of the process which also promotes the leader's self-awareness at the start and throughout the engagement. It also enables the coach to manage the expectations of sponsors, where applicable. If, for whatever reason, the leader does not have the courage, humility and discipline to commit to the process, the coach and the leader should reconsider commencing the coaching process. A lack of commitment and motivation will undermine leadership growth and efficient use of resources for all involved. Experienced coaches know that effectively assessing coachability and having the courage to stop the process where necessary, is crucial to achieving measurable leadership growth.

As coaches, we need to have the courage to understand the leader's commitment to change. If leaders are just "going through the motions" with no clear commitment, the coaching process will not reap the expected results regardless of your skills and expertise as a coach. While determining the growth areas at the beginning of the process, coaches need to ensure that the change objectives come from "inside" the leader being coached. Coaching engagements rarely lead to success if these objectives are externally imposed without clear internal commitment. As coaches we need to make it clear that we are there to help our clients do the work - not to do the work for our clients.

Having a no growth no pay framework helps coaches become more astute in assessing coachability. After all, our coaches want to get paid and so quickly learn to discern leaders who are (not) coachable. This is better for everyone involved. No coach or organization wants to invest time and resources in coaching leaders who are not coachable and do not grow as leaders. Our no growth no pay guarantee, our process of demonstrating measurable results, and our focus on assessing coachability are well aligned and positively reinforcing each other. All of these in turn greatly contribute to strengthening our coaches' brand and reputation. We will talk more on this in our next and final part.

This article is based on earlier publications by Marshall Goldsmith, Will Linssen, Frank Wagner & Chris Coffey.