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Coaching for success

What are key ingredients that make a coaching relation successful?

- Clear and measurable objectives to work against, *within* an agreed upon timeframe
- The coach works against *your* objectives, you do not work against *his* methodology
- Clear rules of engagement (“table manners”), as well as *disengagement*
- Unequivocal accountabilities for both him and you
- Mutual candor and chemistry. You don’t need to *like* him, as long as he’s effective in helping you grow towards your goals. The relationship needs to “work”

Clear objectives

In a coaching relationship it is immensely important that *prior* to the engagement, the coach and client are in agreement what exactly the objectives are. What should be the result from the coaching relationship? This also means clarifying what success will look like, how it can be discerned. The coaching agreement provides clarity and focus. It also safeguards against expectations from either side that are (too) unlikely to be met.

A coaching engagement has a defined start and end date. Sometimes the end date can be made contingent upon meeting one of several criteria. For instance: either certain skills are mastered as displayed by behaviors XYZ, *or* a fixed calendar date has expired and the coach has delivered on his promises.

Methodology

There are a lot of “methods” all claiming superiority but there is no, absolutely zero evidence, that any method works better than another! So what is important is to be pragmatic and flexible with regards to the approach, but *not* with regards to the objectives.

Be wary of *any* method claiming superiority, because there is no validated empirical evidence for higher effectiveness of any one approach.

The chosen methodology should be molded around the client's unique situation and needs, so as to reach the objectives as quickly and easily (Occam's razor) as possible. Any irrelevant baggage, is well... baggage.

Rules of engagement

You need to agree with your coach on how you interact, and how you get access to each other. You both have agenda's, commitments and accountabilities. For coaching to be successful, it should not get in the way of primary responsibilities, *nor* can you allow "business as usual" to get in the way of required behavior change. There's a reason why set ways require a coach to accelerate growth. It is *his* responsibility to help you break through dysfunctional loops if necessary (this can be painful).

If the sponsor of the coaching engagement is someone else besides the coachee (which is quite common), you need to agree how that 3rd party is involved. This can be a relation where he is apprised of progress and findings, or not. Both are absolutely fine and possible, but what is more important is that all agree about this at the outset. And of course you need to agree how to *end* the coaching engagement. Coaching is not a lifelong umbilical cord, it's a working relation with a clear beginning and end.

Mutual accountabilities

It is very important to be clear what the mutual accountabilities are in order to "lock" progress into the environment, and also to ensure change is sustainable. No one operates in a vacuum, so often some (informal) contracts need to be established that acknowledge how change is affected by, and will affect the social environment.

How will you see to it that your new behavior becomes and *stays* your default mode of operating? Does this demand new contingencies? If so, the people who will be holding you accountable for your new skills need to be "in the loop". When you are less than pleased with your coach, is there anyone you can turn to?

Chemistry

Nobody can tell what interpersonal chemistry really is, but when we feel it we recognize it. These days it is certainly possible, and in many cases feasible to maintain the coaching relationship at a distance.

That's what modern day communication technology is for. However, it is still preferable to get to know each other a little in person first. Not in the least part to get a feel for this chemistry. You don't necessarily need to be "friends", or become amicable. But it is immensely important that there is mutual respect and candor so that you can share good and nice, but also feedback that isn't necessarily "nice" but important to hear. That is where some amount of face contact is necessary to cement the relationship – a *working* relationship!