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The F.O.C.U.S. of Business Coaching

By Barry K. Zweibel

Business coaching is still fairly new, but its value, impact, and popularity is growing rapidly. Certainly the press things so, as this sampling of excerpts indicate:

The Harvard Business Review

"The goal of coaching is the goal of good management - to make the most of an organization's valuable resources."

Newsweek Magazine

"Part consultant, part motivational speaker... coaches work with managers, entrepreneurs, and just plain folks, helping them define and achieve their goals."

Money Magazine

"The benefits of coaching appear to win over even the most cynical of clients within just a few weeks."

The Wall Street Journal

"THE EXECUTIVE says his fears disappeared when his supervisor described the proposed coaching as an opportunity 'to get some outside points of view on what we do'."

CNN.com

"Once used to bolster troubled staffers, coaching now is part of the standard development training for elite executives and talented up-and-comers."

Business Week

"As for coaching, having someone listen to you and encourage you, and break everything down into easy concrete steps is rather nice."

What coaching ISN'T!

For the uninitiated, those quotes help explain what coaching IS. It might be

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even more instructive, however, to look at what business coaching ISN'T:

Business coaching ISN'T about fixing “broken” people

Organizations that hire coaches tend to see their people as already successful. Still, they believe their employees could be even more successful if given the opportunity and resources to do so.

Business coaching ISN'T just pleasant chit-chat

Although coaching conversations can be quite enjoyable, a coach's job is to help you move forward in a way that's in keeping with who you are and what you want. And since a key goal of coaching is to facilitate deep learning and lasting change, coaching conversations are designed to be both relevant and resonant (read: worth your while). To that end, it's essential that both the coach and coaching participant attend the coaching call ready to work. (Yes, perhaps surprisingly, most coaching is done by telephone!)

Business coaching ISN'T something everyone is good at

Sure, anyone can try to coach. (And many do!) But not everyone can coach well because it requires a mastery of advanced communication and relating skills, coupled with solid business experience, know-how, and a special commitment to helping professionals flourish. That's why talking with co-workers, a spouse, friends or even your boss doesn't always work. A fully trained and certified business coach has both the will, and the skill, to help you figure it all out.

Coaching isn't therapy, either

Although it can be quite therapeutic. It's not about giving you the answers, as a consultant might, or bullying you into something, as some managers might try to do, either. No, coaching is about helping you figure out your own answers. It's about helping you become a better communicator WITH YOURSELF because when you do, you naturally work harder and smarter to maximize the value you provide to your company, the people you work with, the customers you serve, and yourself.

How a business coach helps you F.O.C.U.S.

It's about focus. And the very word, focus, serves as an excellent acronym for how a business coach can help you - and your direct reports - better F.O.C.U.S. on achieving great things:

F stands for FACE IT:

All too often people in business sell themselves short by avoiding what they don't already know how to do. This is a natural tendency, but one that makes us more and more risk averse over time. And that can spell disaster in today's business climate. What coaching allows you to do is learn new skills in the safe, supportive, and confidential way so that when you're given that new assignment, or seemingly impossible challenge, you have the confidence and creativity you need to face it head on and really hit the ground running.

O stands for becoming more OPENMINDED:

The very things we do that make us successful are often exactly what keep us from being more successful still. Attention to detail may have solidified your reputation for quality work, but it might just be what's stopping you from improving your delegation skills and fully utilizing your employee resources. Similarly, your natural ability to work independently may be what's undermining your efforts to improve your staff's teamwork. A coach helps you understand how you get in your own way, to recognize your default behaviors, and to re-tool your actions to be more consistent with what you're really trying to accomplish. It's what flexibility was meant to

mean!

C stands for identifying CHOICES:

For many, the question is, "What choices?" Or at least it seems that way. They know what SHOULD be done, but they'll be the first to tell you how impossible it is to do it that way. And since the only other choices they see are "less than that" - and therefore not worth doing - well, it's no surprise why things don't get done. A coach helps you break out of this rut. Through thought-provoking questions, comments, brainstorming, role-playing, and a variety of other 'homework' assignments and accountabilities, your coach challenges you to find new possibilities - ones you haven't already discarded - ones that are really worth trying.

U stands for UNAMBIGUOUSLY moving forward:

In business, it's about making things happen. As such, your professional success is determined by your ability to make good things happen SOONER - or not. So getting real clear on WHAT it is you want to do, HOW it is you're going to do it and WHEN it is you're going to do it, is why working with a business coach makes so much sense. It's about your success - no ifs, ands, or buts.

S stands for SOLIDIFYING the learning:

We've all made mistakes. Big ones, too! But that won't determine your future as much as what you learn (or don't learn) from those mistakes. Same too with your successes. What enabled that to happen? What would have facilitated things further? What do you want to try next? A business coach will ask you these questions - and ones like them - so that you can find insights and discoveries that come from them. It may sound counter-intuitive, but hindsight is a great planning tool! By looking back at the challenges you've faced and the lessons you've learned, you can't help but be smarter and more capable for it. But you have to do it. And a coach makes sure you do.

Wishing is NOT strategy.

If you think a business coach can help you, don't wait - write out your reasons why. List some specific goals and objectives a coach could help you with. Identify the upside potential in terms of time, effort, productivity, customer service, or profitability, as example. Think in terms of hard- and soft-dollar savings, if you can. Make your case as compelling as you can and then send a copy to your boss ... with a request for approval to proceed. (And send a copy to me, too, if you don't mind!)

Whatever you do, don't give up before even trying. Keep the F.O.C.U.S. and good things WILL happen sooner!

About the Author

Barry Zweibel is president of GottaGettaCoach! Incorporated. As a fully-certified business/personal life coach, he helps smart, capable people sharpen their focus, increase their personal power and improve their communications savvy in a way that's light, bright, engaging and fun! Visit www.ggci.com

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