

Don't be the last to know

How executive coaching overcomes ineffective leadership styles **Interviewed by Paul R. Harvey**

When a poor leadership style is revealed by climate surveys or 360 feedback, ugly symptoms like frequent turnover and low morale may already have a foothold in the company.

There are many ineffective leadership styles — from being too collaborative, too analytical, too controlling or too slow — that can send employees running to the exits.

“One of the most difficult styles for teams is when the leader is perceived as arrogant and self-serving,” says Linda Miller, global liaison for coaching, The Ken Blanchard Companies. “This style often results in a team that is demoralized or stalled in its development toward self-reliance because the leader wants to be overly involved.”

Smart Business recently spoke with Miller about how executive coaching, if properly sold and embraced, can help struggling leaders recognize behaviors like arrogance that, when changed, create opportunities for exponential personal and team growth.

How is an executive best sold on a coaching program?

Especially with high-level leaders, it's important to position executive coaching as an investment, based on wanting them to progress upward in the company. Even when behaviors need to be addressed, positioning coaching as an investment rather than as a punishment creates higher buy-in from the leader.

One of the first areas to address with arrogant and self-serving leaders is their level of self-awareness. Often with arrogance, the level of self-awareness is low, even though the leader may not agree that it's low. Denial might be another way to put it. Getting this leader's attention is a first step, and this can occur through multirater (360) feedback tools. Part of the purpose and goal of coaching is to get agreement that the leader is behaving in a way that is having an unintended impact. If the leader doesn't agree that behaviors need to change, it limits the success of the coaching. The success of the coaching improves when the leader is fully engaged with the process and recognizes that behaviors must change.



Linda Miller
Global liaison for coaching
The Ken Blanchard Companies

What happens in the early phases of the coach/leader relationship?

In the interview and early phases of coaching, rapport and credibility must be established within the first few minutes. Whether the initial coaching contacts are by telephone or face to face, there has to be a sense that there is a good connection and partnership for a working relationship. Part of this is establishing a clear agreement about what coaching is and is not, what to expect, logistics, etc. It's also important to establish the leader's level of buy-in. For example, is the leader complying with the coaching because he or she was required to be coached, or does the leader want to be coached, knowing that he or she is engaging in the process as a choice for his or her own development? Once this is determined, it's time to identify and clarify the focus for the coaching. Identifying at least two to three clear objectives for coaching, based on feedback, is best. Many leaders decide to invite their leader or HR professional into this conversation to ensure the correct objectives are being addressed — for the leader as well as the organization.

LINDA MILLER is global liaison for coaching at The Ken Blanchard Companies and co-author of a new book entitled, “Coaching in Organizations: Best Coaching Practices from The Ken Blanchard Companies.” Reach her through The Ken Blanchard Companies Web site at www.kenblanchard.com/miller.

How do accomplished leaders first react to the coaching experience?

There are a variety of responses. Many have no idea what to expect. Some don't want the truth and are reluctant or defensive. Others embrace the coaching eagerly. I've been asked, ‘What makes you credible to coach me, and why should I talk with you?’ Another commented, ‘I have no idea what coaching is or why I'm here. Am I in trouble?’ Another said, ‘I know where I want to go in this company, but I'm not getting there. I'm committed to moving forward.’ In a best-case scenario, the leader will be open with the coach and express concerns, skepticism or hope so that the responses can be addressed early.

What benefits await leaders who make the commitment to coaching?

Leaders who embrace coaching can find themselves growing exponentially. Remember, we are talking about high-functioning people. When they embrace coaching, they often recognize behaviors or results they hadn't seen before, and they can use this to make substantial changes in their team.

A great example is the senior leader who knew he was going to be tapped for an executive position, and coaching was offered to him for his development. Many years before, this person had seriously offended an executive leader in the organization and now this executive was blocking his promotion. As part of the coaching, the leader decided that he needed to clean up this old mess, and he spent several coaching sessions planning his approach. When he called the executive and took responsibility for the situation that had occurred, he was amazed at the executive's response. Several months later, the leader was tapped for the executive position and ultimately found out that his former adversary had become one of his biggest advocates. This is just one of the prizes that can await those who embrace coaching. <<

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