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Coaches are Not Managers

By Jim Selman

We often think of coaching in the areas of sports or the performing arts, like the coach of a team, the director of a play or an orchestra conductor. Only recently have we seen interest and enthusiasm for bringing coaching into business organizations. There is a lot of confusion about what coaching really is, how it is different from management and how to have it make a difference.

New Words for the Same Old Thing

There is rightly some skepticism about new management ideas. Sometimes we appropriate new words to describe what we are already doing. For example, it is common to hear people speak about coaching as a word to describe counseling, friendly management, mentoring, supervision, psychological interventions and advising.

Coaching is none of these.

It is important for executives who are considering bringing coaching practices into their organizations to understand what coaching really is if they are not to be disappointed and join the skeptics who dismiss this powerful idea as just another 'flavour of the month'.

What is Coaching?

Coaching is a different paradigm, a different context for getting things done with people. Coaching requires a different way of observing, a different way of thinking, and a different 'way of being'. While some managers may also naturally be good coaches, traditionally there are some very fundamental differences:

- ✓ Managers see their role as directing or controlling people's performance to accomplish predictable results. *Coaches view their work as exclusively about empowering people to accomplish **unprecedented results** on their own.*
- ✓ Managers have goals and are generally focused on previously defined tasks. *Coaches are oriented to the commitments of the people they coach and align **commitments** with the common objectives of the organization.*
- ✓ Managers try to motivate people. *Coaches insist that people **motivate themselves**.*



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- ✓ Managers are responsible for the people they manage. *Coaches demand that the people they coach be responsible for themselves and the game they are playing.*
- ✓ Managers derive power from authority. *Coaches derive power from their relationship with the people they coach and their mutual commitments.*
- ✓ Managers think about what is wrong and why problems happened. *Coaches are looking for **what is missing** and what needs to happen in the future.*
- ✓ Managers look at the future based on their best predictions. *Coaches look **from the future** as a possibility in the context of a commitment to creating a new reality.*
- ✓ Managers lead teams. *Coaches create opportunities for others to lead.*
- ✓ Managers plan to determine what the group should do. *Coaches make unreasonable commitments and then **plan how to fulfill those commitments**.*
- ✓ Managers solve problems within constraints and limits. *Coaches **use constraints and limits** to achieve breakthroughs...unprecedented results.*
- ✓ Managers focus on techniques for getting people to do work. *Coaches provide a way for people to see **possibilities and choices** for themselves.*
- ✓ Managers use rewards and punishment to control behaviour. *Coaches trust and enable the people they coach to manage their own behaviour.*
- ✓ Managers are reasonable. *Coaches are **unreasonable**.*
- ✓ Managers think employees work for them. *Coaches work for the people they coach.*
- ✓ Managers may or may not like the people they manage. *Coaches **love the people** they coach—whether they like them or not.*
- ✓ Managers look for results and whether they agree or disagree with reasons for what happened. *Coaches look for results and whether they **observe actions** that are consistent with people's commitments.*
- ✓ Managers maintain and defend the existing organizational culture. *Coaches create a new organizational culture.*



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Sometimes people want to know why creating a ‘coaching culture’ is so important for modern organizations today. The reason is simply that our traditional ways of managing are not working as well as they have in the past. The global economy, new technologies, the quality and reengineering movements and competition have “changed the game”. Companies today no longer have the luxury of time to control everything from the top. Organizations that win are those that can respond quickly to changes in markets, technology, government policies and social attitudes. This kind of capability for change cannot be programmed effectively into systems and procedures. Organizations need people who can think for themselves and respond instantly to what is needed and wanted...like in a world-class sporting event.

Coaching and empowerment aren’t just nice ideas that are good for people. They are becoming strategic necessities for companies committed to winning. We will always need management. The paradigm and style of management, however, is transforming from one of control and prediction to one of empowering and creating the future that we want to have. Coaches also work with individuals in every area of life to help them accomplish results that are beyond what they have been able to accomplish. To have the capacity to accomplish whatever people are committed to is the essence of what it means to be empowered.