

THE FULL POTENTIAL

TEN WAYS to Bring Out the Latent
Potential in **YOUR PEOPLE**

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Let's come roaring out of the gates in this book with a secret.

Being a great coach, helping others achieve their fullest potential, is both a skillset and a mindset.

—

Boom.

Mind blown.

Or mindset blown, if you aren't already in the right one (which you likely are since you're reading this book).

So let's assume you are, and that you don't, by the way, need me to lay out the case for the need to coach. This isn't global warming, and you're not a small-minded politician, so no need to make the case. Helping others achieve their fullest potential helps the business, helps the person, and helps you, all in profound ways.

Case closed. Judge Judy style.

So back to that mindset.

It turns out that the most effective coaches see the world differently.

They have a specific mindset engrained, one that serves as a launching pad for the coaching outcomes with the greatest trajectory.



The Full Potential Coaching Mindset

THE FULL POTENTIAL COACHING MINDSET

Research in the field of coaching science indicates there are six core principles that serve as the foundational mindset of the most effective coaches.

TRUST IS THE TETHER

Great coaches know that coaching efforts will fail if a foundation of trust is not in place between the coach and coachee. Mutual trust is what will keep the two parties bound to and supportive of one another, even in the most difficult conditions. Scads of research indicate that the number one cause of ineffective coaching relationships is the absence of trust.

IT'S ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS, NOT REPORTING LINES

Great coaches view the interplay with the coachee as a relationship, just like any other important relationship in their lives - and so they act and invest accordingly. Great coaches understand that they influence through personal power, not position power.

YOU EITHER CARE, OR YOU DON'T. THERE IS NO GREY ZONE

Related to the above principle, you either care deeply about the person for whom you're to provide coaching, or you don't. There is no middle ground. Those who find themselves in the middle ground, don't, in fact, care then. So don't live in the middle or hang on the fringes. Care about their betterment. Care about them as a person. Care enough to have empathy. Care enough to listen, really listen. Dive in and commit with your mind and heart.

IT'S ABOUT IMPROVING, NOT PROVING

Professor Heidi Grant Halvorson of Columbia's Motivation Science Center urges us to ditch the focus of a "Be Good" mindset, one where we are constantly trying to prove our superiority to the world, and instead shift to a "Be Better" mindset, one where we are focused on being better than we were yesterday. Along with this should come a great appreciation of the fact that there's so much more to learn.¹

Your job as a coach is to believe in the coachee's potential and help him/her achieve it. And it's about progress relative to their own potential, not relative to some other externally focused measuring stick.

It's about improving, instead of proving.

Now hold on, some of you might be saying. In my company, the reality is that we compare and calibrate performance relative to others. So I have to coach them to a level where they can shine relative to their peer group.

Understood.

I'm not refuting that reality. The distinction I'm making is where to place the focus; it should be on what the motivating force for improvement is because that's what you and coachees can control.

To address this specific conundrum, first ensure that the improvement you're coaxing is on things important to the company and with a relative, agreed upon standard in mind. Think of that as the North Star of performance to aim for – the standard to which they will be compared relative to their peers.

But the lighthouse, the thing that keeps coachees off the rocks and guides them more directly, is the comparison to his/her self. Conversations in the coaching journey should focus on that. If your coachees are becoming the best version of themselves that they can, without leaving anything on the field, that's what you can control. At that point, their performance relative to their peers will take care of itself. Trying to coach someone specifically to a standard that places them above a peer set will likely lead to frustration. Such standards can only be a North Star, at best, for a reason. The standard will shift course and magnitude based on the performance of others - again, something you can't control.

YOU'RE NOT A FIXER, YOU'RE A FACILITATOR

The most common mistake eager coaches make is that in their haste to add value to the coaching relationship, they jump in and go into "fix" mode. They gather the facts, penetrate, sort through options, and find solutions for coachees – all in an effort to help.

However (you see where I'm going with this), this is not coaching.

Your job is to facilitate coachees belief that they have everything they need at their disposal to find their own solution. As CEO of Helen of Troy and coaching standout, Julien Mininberg, told me, "Great coaches believe in the idea of teaching – a teach 'em to fish kind of thing."

Much more on that later.

IT'S AN INVESTMENT THAT PAYS MUTUAL DIVIDENDS

Great coaches don't hesitate to make the investment required in a coaching relationship. In fact, they prioritize it, look forward to it, make it fun, and find it rewarding. They view it as "Why I'm Here".

So thanks for being here.

And if you don't fully view it that way today, by the way, you can get there. All it takes is one great coaching experience and you'll be hooked.

Let's make sure the next coaching relationship you invest in does just that.

We move now to employing the art and science of great coaching, the 10 keys to helping you bring out that temperamental, but oh so transformational, potential in your people.



Have Personalized,
Prepared Coaching
Sessions

TEN WAYS TO BRING OUT THE LATENT POTENTIAL IN YOUR PEOPLE

ONE: Have Personalized, Prepared Coaching Sessions

The reality is that potential turns potent when it's carefully planned for - it doesn't happen by circumstance.

Plain and simple, great coaches design great coaching sessions.

John Wooden, legendary coach of the UCLA men's basketball team, was such a coach.

Wooden's teams won ten NCAA national championships, including an incredible seven in a row from 1967-1973, a feat considered by many to be the greatest coaching accomplishment of all time.

Wooden's secret?

No, not "Artic Blitz" Gatorade.

His level of preparation for coaching/practice sessions.

Wooden was legendary for the amount of meticulous preparation he put into each and every practice, looking at each session as being filled with teachable moments. He kept detailed 3 x 5 cards on each player and reviewed them with his staff as part of a two-hour planning session before each practice - the planning session often lasting longer than the practice!

He added detailed notes on each player after every session, year after year, and kept them all in a loose-leaf notebook to refer to over and over. He was careful to note the nuances of each of his players as well, keeping front and center how best to teach and motivate each individual.

Said Wooden, “They’re all different. I could name players, all who were spirited, but in a different way. You can’t work with them exactly the same way. You’ve got to study and analyze each individual and find out what makes them tick.”

Wooden’s passion for preparation and teaching during these coaching sessions was extraordinary as well. When he retired from basketball, he was very vocal about what he would miss most. It wasn’t the championship banners, nor the fame, nor fortune, but the practices.²

Such a passionate, prepared, and individualized approach created many meaningful bonds between him and his instructees, as noted by fond remembrances from former players. And the impact on sustaining, elevated, performance speaks for itself.

I’m not suggesting that you strive for replication of this story, I realize that’s unrealistic.

Heck, on some days I barely have enough time to “forget” to empty the garbage let alone thoroughly plan for a coaching session.

But you can take inspiration from Wooden’s story.

And you can get started on your own disciplined approach with a PLAN (Personalized Landscape Assessment for Nurturing).

This is a tool to help you personalize and set parameters for coaching discussions. It helps you plan for each coaching discussion grounded in the nuances of each individual’s unique blueprint. The idea is to produce a better results-based outcome but also to help the coachee become a better version of themselves, not a better version of you. It’s important to understand and appreciate the clay you are working with. You can help provide vibrant and unique glaze but you start by molding the clay you have in hand. The tool helps provide structure for the coaching discussion as well. Here’s what the tool looks like:

PLAN (PERSONAL LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT FOR NURTURING)

PERSONALIZATION (Individual Landscape Assessment)	PARAMETERS (Structure for Coaching Discussion)				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience • Embodiment • Energy 	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">Start (establish purpose and desired outcome)</td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">Middle (guide vs. prescribe)</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">End (time-bound & measurable plan, clear expectations set)</td> </tr> </table>	Start (establish purpose and desired outcome)	Middle (guide vs. prescribe)	End (time-bound & measurable plan, clear expectations set)	
Start (establish purpose and desired outcome)	Middle (guide vs. prescribe)				
End (time-bound & measurable plan, clear expectations set)					

FIRST, TO HELP TAILOR COACHING TO THE INDIVIDUAL, KEEP IN MIND THE 5E’S OF PERSONALIZATION:

Experience

The first mental checkpoint in preparing for a great coaching discussion is to consider the experience level of the coachee – in general and relative to the topic at hand. The greater the experience level, the fewer directives required.

For the more experienced, be looking for places to add unique value and perspective versus telling them what they likely already know (i.e. giving the “advice of the obvious”). Be confirmatory where applicable to reassure their seasoned point of view, not condescending by dictating your own. Give verbal valuing cues that show you give credence to their experience base (“I know you’ve walked a mile on this...”). Showing you value what they bring to the table from the past will help them be more receptive to guidance for the future.

And it will keep them from forming an “anti-you” Facebook friend group.

For the less experienced, it’s OK to assume that the perspective you bring is more often going to be new perspective. It’s a matter of how you get that perspective to surface, a topic we’ll cover a bit later.

Embodiment

What do each of your coachees embody? What is their style for getting things done? What are their natural strengths that you can help them harness to achieve their objectives?

The idea here is to look at the guidance you’ll provide through this lens. Help them achieve and do things in a manner that fits with their DNA. Remember, the idea here is to help them become a better, more effective, version of themselves. That’s not to say you shouldn’t be providing course corrections and adjustments if elements of their style are simply ineffective. This is about making an intentional effort to mold with the specific clay in front of you.

At times when it’s necessary to give specific counsel it’s helpful to ask yourself, “Am I about to share exactly how I’d do it, or am I going to give an objective and let them figure out how to achieve it in their own way?”

Energy

It’s helpful to keep an eye on coachees level of energy during a coaching session. If it’s fairly obvious they’re not particularly passionate about a reasonably important topic at hand, they may just be looking for you to give them the answer so they can move on. Sometimes that may be the right move, but in general – try to resist this temptation.

A great coach is always looking for ways to help push the thinking and engagement level of

coachees. Getting coachees to engage and think through the topic, versus simply waiting for the answer, may even create different perspectives that unlock new levels of interest. At a minimum, it offers coachees another chance to practice formulating their own point of view, problem solve, and lead the thinking of others.

EQ

Sometimes it's necessary to not only be mindful of what coachees are saying, but how they are saying it. Assess what the state of their emotions is during the coaching session. Are there veiled, or even overt, amped-up emotions skewing the discussion? Such emotional encounters should put the skilled coach on alert. Job number one is to understand what's really going on with the individual/situation, and to do so with empathy.

Most often when coachees are emotional, they aren't looking for coaching. They just want a safe place to vent.

Let them.

The first step is to listen. Listen to what's said and not said. Is there important perspective being left out? Then gently look to round out their point of view and get the discussion focused on solutions. Highly emotional discussions often center around interactions with other people. The truth of interactions between two parties often lies somewhere in the middle. So try to get at the root of what might be amiss by helping coachees to see things through the lens of the "offending party" as well. Different reward systems and motives often get in the way, help coachees understand that. Intent is more often than not, pure.

If the emotion is not about venting, it's about some shortcoming coachees are feeling, or something else that could be going on in their work or personal life. Empathy, patience, listening, and gentle questioning will help reveal what's going on so that you can proceed accordingly.

Or you can hire a private detective to snoop around. Just don't try to expense it.

Experience desired

Through trial and error, and open conversation, over time you'll learn to adjust and refine how coachees like to be coached and engaged in coaching discussions. Every one of us likes to receive information and guidance in slightly nuanced ways. For example, some like lots of accompanying examples while some want just the facts. Some like to be given "leads"; some prefer nothing but agreement to the goal. The potential iterations and nuances are endless, so just ask your coachees what's working for them (or not) in your coaching discussions. Simply being aware of style preferences can go a long way towards ensuring great coaching discussions.

WITH A PLAN FOR PERSONALIZATION IN PLACE, IT'S TIME TO SET PARAMETERS AND PROVIDE STRUCTURE TO THE COACHING DISCUSSION:

Start (establish purpose and desired outcome)

Understanding the purpose and desired outcome of a meaningful coaching discussion is especially important or you'll be tempted to dive in and problem solve. And nothing is more frustrating to coachees than when you're giving them advice on something they don't need (that's why we have mother-in-laws). We've all been there; you sit patiently waiting for a break in the action and a chance to redirect the discussion towards what you really need help on.

Don't be that guy/girl.

Expect (and ask if necessary) coachees to establish the purpose and desired outcome of the coaching discussion up-front.

End (time-bound & measurable plan, clear expectations set)

The coaching discussion should end with an agreed upon, specific, time-bound, and measurable plan and path forward. And the coach should take the opportunity to clarify expectations. Gallup research across over 80,000 managers listed "knowing what's expected of me" as the number one dimension for what correlates with a healthy workplace.³ (Number two was "knowing what time my boss leaves so I can leave ten seconds after")

Middle (guide vs. prescribe)

The middle, or meat of the coaching discussion, is in and of itself its own element in the Full Potential list. Let's go there next.



Guide vs.
Prescribe

TWO: Guide Vs Prescribe

For a coaching discussion to be truly powerful, the role of the coach is to expand coachees point of view, versus simply giving coachees their point of view.

In so doing, you create mind-opening, growth enhancing, new awareness for coachees.⁴ To accomplish this, the coach should engage in “pull” vs. “push” behaviors during the coaching discussion, where they are skillfully pulling out coachees points of view versus forcing it upon them.

THE GUIDE VS. PRESCRIBE SPECTRUM THAT FOLLOWS HIGHLIGHTS BEHAVIORS ON BOTH THE PUSH AND THE PULL SIDE OF THE SPECTRUM:

The idea is to engage in behaviors on the right side of the spectrum (pull behaviors) during the coaching discussion to expand coachees points of view (and to maximize their personal growth).

To understand how unappealing the left side of the spectrum is, let’s consider the behaviors

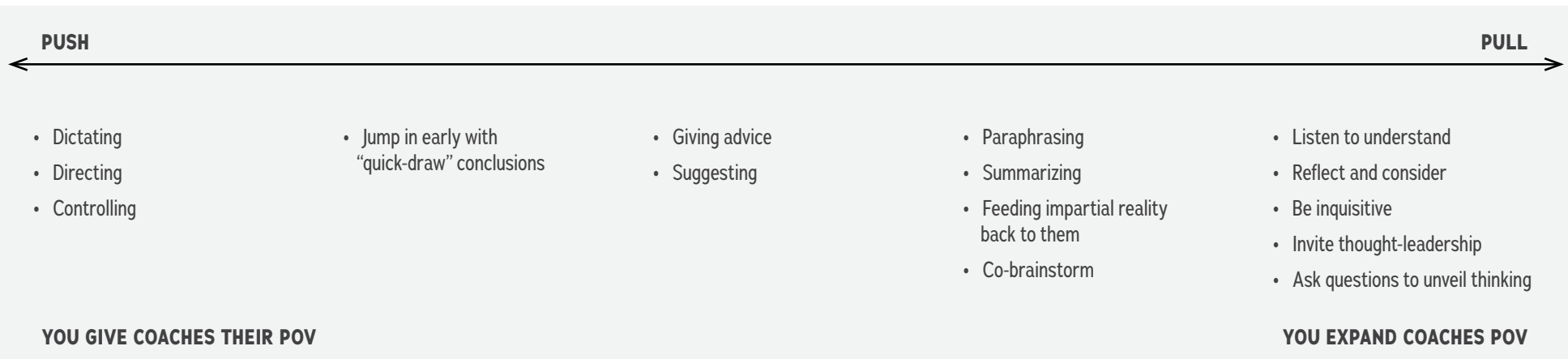
of dictating, directing, or controlling. What do you think you’re going to be more committed to and energized by, something your boss directed you to do, or something you yourself discovered should be done?

No contest.

Surprisingly, research indicates the middle of the spectrum isn’t that much better.

While there certainly is value in giving advice (just as there are times when dictating/directing is necessary, like in crisis), it can have the same negative effect as directing. Meaning, coachees can take the advice as an actual dictate, not just advice. This is especially true if coachees are much less experienced than the coach, if coachees have a pleaser personality, or if the coach gives the advice in an expectant tone.

So let’s stay on the right side to bring out the bright side.



That's where you paraphrase back what you've heard, summarize, listen to understand - all while suspending judgment and "knowing".

By the way, while you're living on the right side, it should be about 80 percent listening, 20 percent talking. Practice the WAIT principle if you have to - ask yourself, "Why Am I Talking?"

If instead you're constantly asking "Why Am I Taunting?", stop reading this book and go get help.

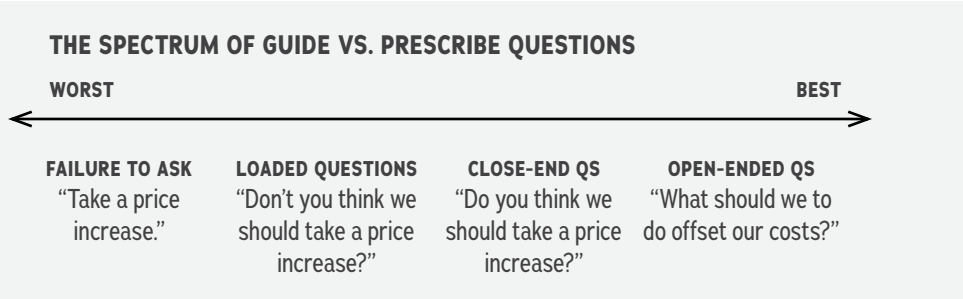
On the right side of the spectrum you invite thought leadership and engage in what is the most important coaching behavior on the entire spectrum, asking questions to unveil thinking. This is where a great coach really puts coachees to work and turbocharges the learning and growth process.

However, the key is not just to ask questions.

The key is to ask better questions.

The chart that follows shows the classifications of questions you can ask coachees, spanning from worst to best in terms of helping to expand their point of view.

THE EXAMPLE QUESTION SUPPOSES YOU WORK ON A BUSINESS WHERE TAKING A PRICE INCREASE MAY NEED TO BE CONSIDERED, AND SO YOU ENGAGE IN A DISCUSSION ABOUT THIS WITH THE COACHEE:



Once again, the idea is to stay on the right side of the spectrum. You can imagine how the open-ended question above would necessitate more thought on the part of the coachee and engender more learning and growth.

So the first rule in asking questions is to ask open-ended questions to expand the coachee's point of view.

Next, to help structure the question-based coaching conversation, I recommend using the GROW model (it's the most widely used guide). This will tie together the Start, Middle, and End sections of the coaching conversation previously outlined - the common thread being

use of open-ended questions. It encourages you to use Goal, Reality check, Options, and Will open-ended questions.

HERE'S SOME EXAMPLES:

Goal

"What do you want to accomplish in our coaching discussion today?", "What would be the ideal outcome for this coaching discussion?"

Reality Check

"What have you tried already and what have you learned from it?", "What happened that got you to this current situation?"

Options

"What should we do to offset our costs?", "Why do you think that is the right option?"

Will

"What will you do by when?", "What can you do to ensure you will hit your timing?"

The next step then is to actually act on coachees responses (if you can indeed see your way there), and make sure they know that you did so. There may be no greater force multiplier than people knowing you've heard them, and that you're acting on what they've said. Mary Kay, founder of Mary Kay cosmetics, built an entire empire around a simple belief, that everyone has an invisible sign around their neck that says "Make me feel important". (For what it's worth, I also believe people have an invisible sign around their neck that says "My job is to go ten miles an hour under the speed limit in front of you whenever you're in a hurry").

Giving coachees the chance to experience the satisfaction of organically influencing a course of action will further drive them to give well thought through responses the next time they're asked an open-ended question. Influencing in such a manner gives coachees a taste of the power of their expanding view point, skillset, and personal growth, and is meaningful beyond measure.



Fiercely Enable

THREE: Fiercely Enable

Great coaches skilled at bringing out the best in others have an unabashed zeal for enabling the troops in as many ways as possible.

And I'm not talking about the baseline expectation of roadblock clearing that comes with the manager job title.

I'm talking about an intense discomfort of knowing that someone is messin' with their cubs. I'm talking about the fact that they get serious distress if they think their people are about to walk into harm's way or if someone is lying on the tracks of progress in front of them.

Great coaches just...can't... stand... the thought.

Said another way – great coaches are unable to not enable.

Ralph Nader once said, “The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.” As a coach you have the ability to encourage those around you to discover and develop their own leadership style. Enabling, and then getting out of the way, is one of the most powerful ways to do this.

The tool that follows will help facilitate this productive cycle. The Enable Table compiles a collection of guiding principles that helps maximize the coach's effectiveness at being a great enabler for his/her team.

SO HOW TO BEST ENABLE? USE THIS TABLE:

THE ENABLE TABLE	
• Crush barriers with glee	• Roll up your sleeves and give real help
• See around corners	• “Ring-fence” under times of duress
• Give and define decision space and process	• Flip the script
• Welcome push back (really)	• Resource the racehorse

A BIT OF EXPLANATORY NARRATIVE FOR EACH OF THE ABOVE:

Crush barriers with glee

To best connect your people to their potential, you have to almost giggle when you're busting down barriers for them. Be a zealot. Derive a ridiculous amount of pleasure in clearing the way. Like the amount of pleasure birds take in your just-washed car.

See around corners

Spend time anticipating on their behalf. You can often prevent someone from slamming into an obstacle simply by taking the time to reflect upon your own similar experiences. Recall what problems arose and help remove potential issues, or even reroute someone if needed.

And remember, the idea here is to see around corners, not corner what you see. By this I mean do anticipate problems on behalf of your team, but don't obsess on beating those problems into submission by yourself in an attempt to be the hero. Let your coachees in on the issues that you see coming, so that they can be a part of hammering out preventative measures.

Give and define decision space and process

Giving decision space can be difficult at times, but defining decision space can be even harder – and both are critical to do. And there may nothing more disabling to people than an ill-defined decision-making process. Decision making tends to give birth to many sons and daughters – and all of them think they have a seat at the family table. So gift your people with a crystal clear decision making process.

By the way, even if the decision-making process produces decisions people don't agree with, they'll still see the fact that a decision was made as extremely enabling.

Welcome push back (really)

Sometimes enabling disagreement can be just what's needed to enable in general. When people don't feel they've had a “fair trial” for a dissenting opinion, they will begrudgingly plod forward, all the while harboring doubt about the course of action. Not feeling heard means not feeling wholly committed – a sure way to disable the heart and mind. As the saying goes, “you have to weigh in before you can buy in”.

And while you're at it, you have to truly believe you can learn from your employees. Keep a running list of what you've learned from your people - and tell them. They'll feel enabled to speak up, and teach up, as long as they understand that you debate, decide, then commit.

Roll up your sleeves and give real help

Ever have someone dig in and help you out of a real predicament (besides posting bail)? You don't forget that. Neither will your people. So when it's called for, get your hands dirty and your conscience clean by personally stepping up and going the extra mile to solve tough problems alongside those in need.

“Ring Fence” under times of duress

Ever notice how you get a lot of “help” in times of adversity (in the form of inquiries and requests from above, aside, and around you)? While it's critical in general to welcome and leverage your chain of command/peer group/functional partners, at times the most enabling thing you can do is to beat back the swarm and ring fence your crew.

Build a metaphorical protective fence around your people in such times. Be the gatekeeper and personally handle the inquiries and requests. Bravely and respectfully set parameters for what the team will and will not answer during the time of duress. (Author's note: “Go pound salt” is not an officially sanctioned Full PoTENTIAL reply. Wink.)

Flip the script

As leaders and coaches, we often walk into a situation where everyone seems to be reading from the same undesirable script. “We can't succeed, we don't have enough time and resources”, “I'm working with the B team here”, “My boss doesn't get me”, “Competition is too brutal”, “We've never been able to do that”. On and on the excuses go. And while some might be perfectly valid, perfectly venomous attitudes are a result.

As a skilled coach, you can enable your team by helping them no longer accept the script from which they're reading (and may even feel like they've been handed). You can encourage them to not accept a victim mentality and not fall prey to the “script”, or seemingly unfavorable reality, as the final word. You enable others when you free them from engrained excuses, unproductive cultural norms, false beliefs, or acidic attitudes.

Sometimes you just need to help them flip the script and start reading, and believing, a different story. Please notice I said “flip the script”, not “flip-off the script”.

Resource the racehorse

Prioritize the key work - your “racehorse” projects in the stable - and let 'em run by fully resourcing them. Failing to prioritize and make choices is a brutally disabling choice in and of itself. Similarly, half-commitment is fully disabling.



Uplift Their Self-Esteem & Self-Confidence

FOUR: Uplift their Self-Esteem & Self-Confidence

There is all too much research and all too many shocking statistics about the variety of serious problems that teenagers tragically face today, such as alarming rates of drug use, pregnancy, alcohol abuse, gun prevalence, and more.

So what's the problem that surfaces in more teen research than any other?

Self-esteem.

As noted by sobering statistics such as the fact that a full 70% of teenage girls believe they are not good enough or don't measure up in some way, including their looks, performance in school, and relationships with friends and family members.⁵

The truth is a surprising number of us begin early in our lives battling issues of self-confidence and self-esteem.

And then we enter the lion's den.

The workplace.

Unfortunately, the research on self-esteem and self-confidence levels is no different for those in the workforce versus teenagers in high school.

Our self-esteem and self-confidence is under assault every day.

Great coaches realize this. And they aren't fooled, by the way, by the seemingly self-sufficient employees that are star performers with great, "low-maintenance" attitudes. Sometimes the highest performers achieve because they're so driven - driven by the need

for approval and verification of worth.

The truth is your people need you, and your reassurance.

Perhaps more than you realize.

Henry Ford once said, “Whether you think you can or you can’t, you’re right”. Eleanor

Roosevelt said, “A good leader inspires people to have confidence in their leader. A great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves.” Former CEO & Chairman of Procter & Gamble, John Pepper, said, “Great coaches help people to accept themselves as they are, even as they work to improve.”

The coaches most skilled at unlocking potential are always on the lookout for the opportunity to bolster the self-esteem and self-confidence of their constituents.

And research shows that the net result of high-esteem equals motivation to achieve higher performance.⁶ Furthermore, an organization filled with the highly self-confident will also breed more positivity and even more elevated performance, because confident people don’t feel the need to bring anyone down.

The good news is that this wonderful chain doesn’t require finding the missing link. It just takes your belief that your coachees success is dependent upon competence and confidence, and that you’ll commit to helping them with both. And it takes incorporating self-esteem/ self-confidence building mechanisms into your coaching approach.

HERE’S A HOST OF HOW TO’S FOR YOUR CONFIDENCE BUILDING TOOLBELT:

HOW TO BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind them to stop comparing themselves to others and to be cognizant of their thoughts, so as to avoid drifting into self-induced negativity • Help them to learn from failures and accept that they’re not perfect • Encourage them to strive for authenticity, not approval • Get them focused on their potential, not their limitations • Respect, trust, empower, and praise them • Make sure they’re set up to win with the proper support and set up to learn, grow, and contribute with challenging work • Ask their opinions and listen to the answers. Solicit their ideas and take action on them • Role model taking care of yourself so they’re encouraged to do the same • Recognize them for the unique individuals they are and reward them for the unique contributions they make. And remember, no one ever complains about receiving too much recognition • Help them believe they belong, believe in their individuality, and believe in themselves • Let them have the ideas • Create a safety zone for them where they can be themselves, test ideas, stretch, and fail without undue punishment • Encourage them that of course they can do great work. But now it’s time to go be outstanding



Get the Skeletons Out of their Closet

FIVE: Get the Skeletons Out of their Closet

No, I'm not talking about getting them to confess their sins. But I am talking about getting them to confess with sincerity their most closely held performance weaknesses.

The honest truth is that we all have skeletons in the closet, or things we aren't good at that we don't want anyone to know about. Things like, "I don't understand the P&L", "I'm no good with the customer", "I stink at analysis", "I'm terrified to speak in front of big groups", or "I don't know how to do the Macarena".

I may have lost the plot on that last one - you get the point.

These fears are often grounded in the real or perceived shortfalls someone feels they have. They are one of the true limiting forces on the path to maximizing full potential and meaning derived at work.

Great coaches have built a foundation of trust such that they inquire about the existence of any such skeletons. They can help coachees tackle their fears head on, in a safe environment. And they can challenge the default mentality, refusing to cede any opportunity for growth, at least until the trouble spot has been thoroughly discussed and assumptions revisited.

The key is getting coachees comfortable enough and brave enough to admit what they're not good at, no matter how seemingly fundamental it might be to their job. Strike an agreement that if they'll come clean, you won't judge them for it. You'll just help catapult them past it. Keep the opportunity "off paper" (i.e. not part of any formal performance review system) and between you and your coachees only.

Unless the opportunity/skeleton involves keeping people in a pit in their basement, then by all means contact the authorities.

Anyway, become "that person" who enabled the coachee to fondly look back on his/her time with you ten years from now with the perceived performance weakness firmly in the rearview mirror and the skill-portfolio richer.



Help them Challenge their Assumptions

SIX: Help them Challenge their Assumptions

There is a silent, guiding force in your coachees lives that has more influence than you can imagine.

We instinctively know the impact that friends and family have on how we live our lives. We know how powerful our dreams and aspirations can be for affecting how we carry on. We know how our desire to be healthy can affect our habits or how our romantic interest in someone can affect our behavior. All are forces in our world as seen and felt as a steady rain.

But do we ever stop to really consider how the assumptions we make shape and mold our actions, behaviors, and our lives?

The impact is profound.

Our assumptions can derail dreams, stop progress in its tracks, self-impose limits, create self-fulfilling prophecies, distort motives and harm relationships, kill creativity, and lead us down unwanted paths. Some assumptions we make with great awareness, many are on autopilot running our lives and guiding our decisions like a subconscious consigliere.

I'm not talking here about the power of positive thinking – assume you'll succeed and you will kinda stuff (with this six-disc set for only \$499.99 in six easy payments, of course).

I'm talking about assumptions taken as fact, that become beliefs, and that ultimately misguide us.

As a coach, one of the huge roles you can play is to help coachees tunnel their way out of a life constricted by their own tunnel vision.

When you help them challenge their assumptions, a veil lifts and new possibilities open up. They can then shatter misconceptions that have been weighing them down. They can leave behind “knowing syndrome” and embrace “growing syndrome”. They’ll see the world differently, more clearly, more vibrantly. The power of truth will unfold before their eyes.

You can help coachees set those truths free in their work life, and life in general.

First, question your questions.

I wrote earlier about the importance of guiding (versus prescribing) via use of open-ended questions.

Here I encourage you to examine the types of questions you’re asking coachees in your day to day operations with them and ensure that you have a helpful dose of assumption challenging questions in the mix. Of course, you shouldn’t pester them with an unending stream – this is about reexamining the portfolio of leadership questions you ask. Perhaps less information request or status update questions and more assumption challenging questions are in order.

Next, encourage coachees to do the eight things that follow to help them push past assumptions on their own.

HECK, PRINT THIS LIST OUT AND HAND IT TO THEM IF IT HELPS:

8 WAYS TO ASSAIL YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

1) Remember all the stakeholders

Assumptions are often based on things that may or may not be true, especially limiting assumptions. Think of all the stakeholders involved and how they’d view the limiting assumptions you’re making. Then, don’t operate in a vacuum, go find out if such assumptions are true. For example, would the product supply team agree that they won’t have enough capacity to supply your new product idea? Would the researchers agree they truly won’t be able to deliver the innovation on time? Would the finance person agree that your investment will be unlikely to generate acceptable returns? You get the idea – don’t constrain possibilities before you even get started.

2) Force fresh perspective

We can fall in a pattern of operating within the same set of assumptions over and over because we continually see things with the same perspective. Break the stasis and bring in fresh viewpoints. Bring outsiders into a brainstorming session. Bring back people that were part of better, winning days and talk to them about what drove success at that time. Conduct a session where you view the world through a competitor’s eyes and model their responses to your moves. Whatever the source, create some tension with the status quo.

3) Watch your language

Words of absolutism can sneak into our assumptions, turning accurate statements into over-generalizations. Stop and pause when you use words and phrases like “never”, “always”, “all of”, and “none of”. Take time to qualify your qualifiers.⁷

4) Think like a science teacher

Assumptions are essentially hypotheses. In the world of science, hypotheses are either accepted or refuted with proof. Call out assumptions when you hear them to raise awareness. Then ask yourself if the assumption on the table has been actually proven, and if so, does it still hold true?

5) Expand time

You can press past assumptions by expanding time in three ways.

- First, know that many assumptions are based on past history – don’t get stuck there. Regard the past, yes, but don’t disregard what may have changed.
- Second, don’t get stuck in the now – consider how things might be in the future and see if your assumptions still hold up. How might industry trends change or negate your assumptions?
- Finally, the idea of expanding time also means to literally expand the amount of time you allot for the process of challenging assumptions. We often make assumptions because it’s easier and quicker. For certain, challenging assumptions can be difficult and time consuming, but you have to do it – too much potential could be left behind.

6) Ask why

Assumptions can quickly have gaping holes exposed when you simply ask why - “Why do I believe this assumption is true?”⁸ The rationale or root cause behind the assumption might quickly be revealed as weak at best.

7) Don’t let data numb you

From time to time I will say to my team, “Use data to go from ‘I think’ to ‘I know’. But don’t let ‘I know’ get in the way of ‘I think.’”

Whoa. Stephen Hawking deep, I know.

While data should certainly be used to inform our decisions, sometimes we can rely on it at the expense of using our gut or in lieu of challenging the assumptions behind the data. Keep a balance.

8) Double click on pain point assumptions

Not all assumptions are created equal. Identify the one or two most critical assumptions you’re making and spend extra time challenging them.

Teach them in Teachable Moments

SEVEN: Teach them in Teachable Moments

Our greatest responsibility as a leader is to help others become better versions of themselves (our second greatest is to appoint someone to run the March Madness brackets for the office pool). We do this through a tireless commitment to teaching, coaching, and investing in those around us. Great leaders are always on the lookout for opportunities to ply this trade. What follows is a little “advance scout” help, a set of eyes on the front lines of daily work life. What exactly are we on the lookout for, you ask?

Tell-tale teachable moments.

WHEN YOU SPOT ONE, DON'T PASS UP THE OPPORTUNITY TO INVEST. HERE ARE THE MOST COMMONLY SEEN RICH MOMENTS WHERE YOUR INVESTMENT CAN EQUAL THEIR BETTERMENT.

9 TELL-TALE TEACHABLE MOMENTS

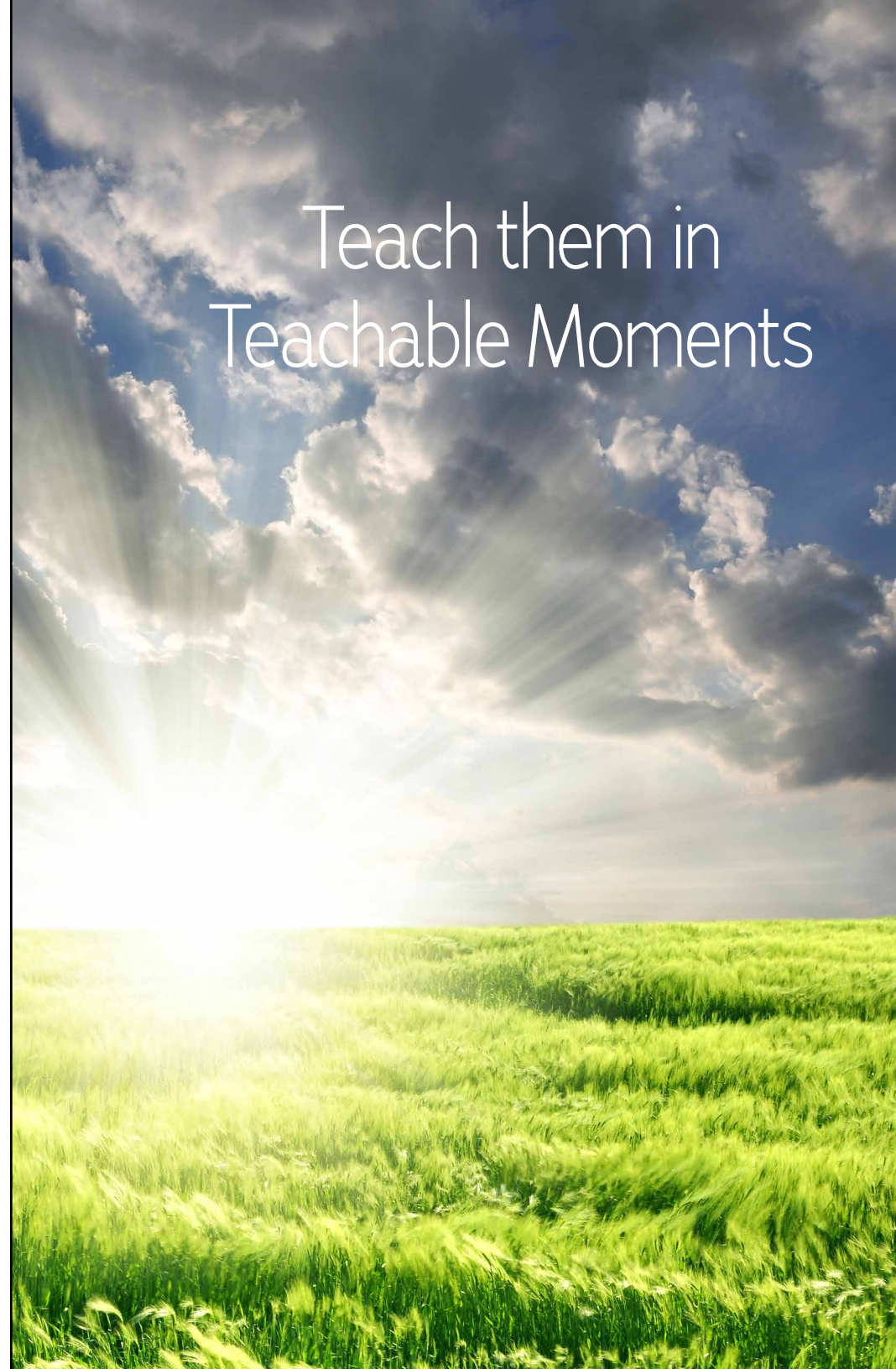
1) When reality doesn't match expectations

I believe in a simple formula: Happiness = Reality – Expectations.

Unhappiness in the manager/employee relationship can come when, as a leader, your expectations aren't being met in reality, or when their expectations were never aligned to yours in the first place (either too low or too high). Any of these scenarios present an opportunity to dig in and understand what is causing the gap. Do so and you'll be sure to excavate useful learning and enable some realignment.

2) When they're seeing things from just their side during conflicts/tension

I mentioned earlier in this book that when it comes to interpretations of a conflict between two sides, the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. A classic tell-tale teachable moment occurs when one of the parties can only see things from his/her point of view. Leaders need to be astute enough to step back and openly and objectively consider the



opposing point of view. It strengthens the outcome, resolves conflict faster, and stretches the muscle that enables leaders to see the bigger picture.

3) When the “A” game is not present in an “A” situation

“A” situations can include big meetings, pivotal points in a project’s life, or a crisis, just to name a few. The lack of “A” game might show up as a highly flawed recommendation, a lack of anticipating questions or pushbacks, poor delivery of key messages, a lack of urgency or proactivity, or any other number of ways in which less than optimal performance showed up in high stakes situations. Don’t miss the chance to instruct here on a very visceral, teachable moment.

4) When someone falls short on a risk taken

Proceed carefully here teachers-in-waiting. The point is not to discourage risk taking, but to encourage more of it. Help the risk takers learn where they went wrong, what they could have done better to avoid the outcome, or what will make the next venture more successful – and do so in an uplifting, encouraging manner. A study conducted by Blessing White found that 41% of employees said their manager never encouraged them to take risks, while another 33% said their manager only sometimes encouraged them to take risks.⁹

Another 100% took the risk of taking home some office supplies every now and then.

5) When they’re not aware of the perception/impression they’re leaving

Every once-in-a-while we all need a mirror held up in front of ourselves. Note that this is a teachable moment, not a preachable moment. The idea is not to lecture them on being more like you, or to have perfect behavior in all situations. This is merely a powerful opportunity to give coachees the gift of insight through introspection. Help them understand how they are showing up, and then help them connect the dots to how they really want to show up. Too many would rather complain about the net impact of someone’s behavior rather than help them to see the impact that very behavior is having on its recipients.

6) When you have the chance to share the view from the window seat

Teachable moments don’t only present themselves through the behaviors and outcomes of coachees – such moments can also arise when you have an applicable experience to share.

Are you coming back fresh from a leadership summit where interesting, important, and relevant things went on (outside of who hooked up with who)? Take the time to download the experience with your team. Just spent time with the CEO and got the chance to see how he/she thinks, feels, and acts? Share your observations with your direct reports. Sharing the view from the window seat helps people see “what it’s like” and presents a great learning opportunity.

7) When you can identify gaps in preparation or thinking

As responsible managers, when we spot gaps we often instinctively just fill them in. But doing so too quickly can mean a teachable moment is bypassed, especially when it comes to gaps in preparation or thinking. Such times present a great opportunity to enroll coachees perpetrating the shortfall and help them to see what still needs to be done or thought through, and why. Such efforts will improve the completeness of their efforts moving forward, and help them more completely develop.

8) When you can spell out the difference between good and great

This is closely related to aligning on expectations, but deserves its own point. Quite often, people don’t deliver great simply because they don’t know what it looks like. I’ve found it to be an incredibly powerful teaching moment when you sit down with coachees and literally spell out the difference between good and great. Create a simple grid with three columns. The first column contains the performance vectors that count most (such as thinking and problem solving, vision, initiative and follow through – whatever performance variables are most important for your business). In the second column, you spell out, in writing, what good performance might look like for each performance variable. In the third column, you spell out, in writing, what great performance looks like for each variable.

Investing the time to do this and talk it through with your coachees will lead to many powerful moments of learning and improved performance. After all, very few people aren’t interested in being great, especially when they clearly understand what that looks like.

9) When tempers are lost or excuses are made

Finally, teachable moments lie in the times when we don’t own the moment in which we react poorly – particularly when we lose our temper or make excuses. While there may be plenty of instances where losing one’s temper is justified, it is rarely productive and presents an opportunity for reflection. What was at the root cause of the outburst? How much of it can coachees own to prevent such tension in the future?

The same applies with excuse-making. Coachees can benefit from seeing how unbecoming it is, and in being honest with themselves about how much of the outcome they own – thus learning, improving, and preventing the need for excuses in the future.



Pinpoint the Issue & Excel at Giving Feedback

EIGHT: Pinpoint the Issue & Excel at Giving Feedback

How many times have you had people working for you that you desperately wanted to help, but you had a hard time pinpointing exactly what it was that they needed to work on? You knew they were not as effective as they could be, and yet the exact malaise eluded you.

Well, you aren't alone.

One of the most common questions I field in the arena of developing others is how to pinpoint one's performance opportunity area. And an opportunity area unidentified or misattributed is a missed opportunity for further personal growth.

Now, when you do pinpoint the opportunity area and share it within the total portfolio of positive and corrective feedback, you're on easy street, correct? After all, we tend to be pretty good at giving feedback in general, right?

Um, no.

A Gallup poll conducted across 47,000 employees and 116 countries indicates just how bad we are at giving feedback. The poll sought to discern agreement to 12 statements centered on engagement at work. The statement that garnered the least agreement (ranking dead last) was the statement "In the last six months, someone has talked to me about my progress."

The truth is, there is a good chance your people really don't know how well (or not) they're performing.¹⁰

And it's not just the quantity of feedback given that is deficient, regrettably, it's also the quality.

An analysis of 131 studies on feedback effectiveness found that "in more than a third of the cases where it was possible to assess the effectiveness of feedback, providing feedback actually hurt subsequent performance."¹¹

Yikes.

Maybe this will make you feel better – I'd argue we are all genetically pre-programmed to be poor at giving feedback, especially corrective feedback. After all, who likes pointing out others shortcomings to them (other than your entire nuclear and extended family)?

Obviously, the practice of giving feedback is a difficult endeavor, so let's make it less so. We'll start with the problematic issue of nailing down someone's opportunity area for improvement – critical for unlocking full potential.

TO DO SO, "THE 5 POINTS OF PINPOINTING" TOOL THAT FOLLOWS CAN HELP YOU HIT THE BULLSEYE.

THE FIVE POINTS OF PINPOINTING

- 1) 90% of the time opportunities lay in the shadow of strengths
- 2) Face reality - get after the real area of opportunity
- 3) Discern between aptitude & attitude based issues
- 4) Isolate the "one-offs" & look for themes
- 5) Calibrate your POV for accuracy

LET'S EXAMINE THE POINT OF EACH OF THESE POINTS.*1) 90% of the time opportunities lay in the shadow of strengths*

When we excel at something, it can quite often house an inverted “downside”. For example, someone who excels at creating and communicating a high-level vision may not be so good at following through on the level of detail required to carry that vision out.

Inversely, someone who excels at attention to detail and thoroughness may not be taking the time to scope up and set a broad vision in a compelling, simple manner. Or perhaps someone who is an outstanding collaborator across all functions may not be decisive enough, for fear of not wanting to leave a valued point of view in the dust.

You get the idea. To help pinpoint what might be holding someone back, think first of what helps them spring forward. The hard-to-put-your-finger-on opportunity may well lay within that juxtaposition.

2) Face reality

Get after the real area of opportunity – Sometimes we are kept from the hard truth because the truth is hard.

It's unpleasant when you're isolating an opportunity that is fairly fundamental to the success of the individual. Perhaps it's really not a style thing, but in fact it's insufficient leadership skills. Or maybe they don't just need to improve their communication, it is truly a quality of thinking issue. It just might be that they are fundamentally and arrogantly not valuing others, not just that they need to collaborate better.

The point is that great coaches cannot let the difficulty and discomfort of seeing things clearly, and calling them true, actually blind them. Honesty and bravery are required to help others reach their true, and truly fulfilling, potential.

In the end, I'd also estimate that at least 90 percent (or more) of those with whom you share tough feedback on a difficult to acknowledge opportunity will appreciate it. Some will tell you so right away. For others, it may take some time. I've had individuals send me a note five years after a tough discussion, thanking me for the honesty in calling out the real opportunity and helping them get to work on it so they could put it behind them. I've even gotten notes from others thanking me for helping them come to the realization that the job they were in just wasn't the right fit. And yes, being a great coach to your people can sometimes even mean helping them out of a job where your best assessment is that they won't succeed.

Some will begrudgingly truly appreciate upon reflection, but never actually tell you.

The point is, the level of difficulty in sharing a tough message is eclipsed only by the level of appreciation for you having shared it.

Unless you have a tough message to share with me. Then just keep it to yourself.

3) Discern between aptitude & attitude issues

To help pinpoint one's opportunity area, it's useful to understand why people underperform in general. Let's first examine the usual suspects.

WHY POOR PERFORMERS DON'T DO WHAT THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO

- They think they're already doing it
- They think something else is more important
- They don't know why they should do it
- There's no positive consequence for doing it
- They don't know what they're supposed to do
- They're rewarded in some way for not doing it
- They don't know how to do it
- They think someone else should be doing it
- They don't know when to do it
- They don't like doing the work they're doing

Next, it's helpful to bucket these causes into aptitude and attitude issues to determine the necessary course of action.

For example, suppose an employee was consistently producing inaccurate or untimely reports, important reports for the operation of the business. The poor performance could be coming from any number of underlying attitude issues. Using the above list as a guide, perhaps they feel that the work is simply uninteresting, they don't know why they're doing it, or they don't feel they specifically should be doing the work. They might think something else is more important, they won't be rewarded for the work, or that they might be rewarded in some way for actually not doing the work. The result is an all too nonchalant attitude toward the task and very indifferent, dispassionate behavior in general.

Great coaches can quickly tease out the root cause of the issue (especially given the trust base established), and develop a plan to address the issue. Perhaps the coach can reframe tasks for employees, show them the importance of the reports, indicate how they'll be rewarded for doing the work well, explain how they are uniquely suited to do it, and discuss the undesired behaviors behind the attitude. Any number of tactics could be employed to help coachees see the task differently and trigger a more favorable underlying attitude and set of corresponding behaviors.

Now let's say that the coach discovers the poor performance is aptitude based. Again, using

the list above as a guide, suppose they discover that employees simply have never gotten training on the reports so they don't actually know what they are supposed to do, how or when to do it, or they actually think they're already doing it correctly. This scenario requires some fundamental skill building to enable people to do the work with success.

The point is that behaviors and outcomes that have attitudinal issues at their core create one path of actions. Those that have a deficient skillset at the core require another. Pinpoint which of the two is at work and adjust your approach accordingly.

4) Isolate the “one-offs” & look for themes

We're all capable of really mucking it up from time to time. As a coach trying to pinpoint an opportunity area for growth, however, you are looking for themes, not “one-off” misses. The one-off miss in and of itself may warrant feedback, but we're talking here about getting to the heart of a theme that may be holding the coachee back. Don't be distracted by a singular event, unless it is symptomatic of some underlying theme you're observing.

5) Calibrate your POV for accuracy

Once you've pinpointed the opportunity areas at hand, or even if you're still in the hypothesis stage, it's a good idea to solicit input from informed outsiders.

One powerful way to do this is to establish what I call an “Observational Board of Directors” for the coachee (OBD). Select a few people who interact with the coachee, but do so from a much more observational and “elevated” point of view, with wisdom and experience under their belt as an aid to judgment.

For example, for a lower level product manager, enroll the VP of Research, the Director of Finance, and the Director of Sales as “board members” (imagining for a moment that they all get opportunities to see the product manager in action, albeit not on a day-to-day basis). Their role on the board is to assist you by observing the product manager from an informed distance, and offering perspective on performance accordingly. Their at arm's-length, yet experienced, point of view can offer another source of pinpointing insight. Furthermore, they've probably seen more than one product manager, maybe even in the same role, and can offer calibrating and comparative insight as well.

Leverage this seasoned input as you hone in on opportunity areas (and strengths) – being certain to use it as an aid, and only an aid, to your own judgment.

With the five points of pinpointing considered, let's move on to the deceptively difficult job of giving feedback. We are pre-programmed to give tough feedback poorly because we instinctively want to sugar-coat it, which often results in our being unclear. Or we want to be clear and end up being too brittle and spur defensiveness. When it comes to positive feedback we might play it too much off the cuff and end up coming across as actually under-valuing or insincere.

It will probably come as no surprise to you at this point that those who excel at coaching also excel at giving feedback. To do so it starts and ends, like so many things do, with the fundamentals. The tool that follows, called “The Fundamentals of Feedback”, provides a framework for the fundamentals and will help you bring back the art of feedback done right.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF FEEDBACK

- Be specific
- Be sincere
- Be calibrating
- Be commensurate
- Be timely
- Be tailored

Be specific

A friend's grandmother used to say, “White bread ain't nutritious”. Same goes with feedback. Generic, bland feedback won't help anybody and has more potential to frustrate - especially if it's unclear what the recipient should go work on or keep doing. It can trigger the “Can you be more specific?” or “Can you give me an example?” question, which can irk an ill-prepared coach, and change the vibe of a feedback discussion altogether. The vast majority of people will also want to get to work on the opportunity area highlighted – difficult to do when they don't know what tools to bring to work on what construction project.

Specificity should also include a focus on facts and the impact of behaviors, not a judgment of the person themselves. Desired alternative behaviors should be discussed.

And as discussed in the process of pinpointing, be brave.

Easier said than done, I know, so here's some help.

In the face of the toughest feedback to give, first start the discussion by simply asking coachees, “How do you think you're doing?”

You'd be amazed at the response you're likely to get. First of all, the fact that you're asking that question will indicate to coachees that something could be amiss.

When people sense this, they instinctively want to arrive at a possible pain point in their own way, easing into it rather than having someone slap them with it. And so they'll feel compelled to control the situation and will start winding their way towards talking about the very opportunity area you want to discuss. More often than not, coachees have enough self-awareness to land at least in the ballpark of what you want to cover. They may even give you a direct path to go straight to the heart of the difficult issue.

That said, I do realize that there are cases where you have to give tough feedback to astoundingly non self-aware individuals.

In those cases, I think back to a coaching seminar I attended early in my career where the instructor encouraged us to treat really tough feedback with “drip irrigation”. Drip irrigation is a watering method used by farmers whose crops grow in the desert. It’s a process of slowly releasing water over a crop in drips via long thin tubes. This is necessary because if the water came pouring out over the crops and onto the hard-baked soil, it would never soak in, just sitting on the surface until it evaporated. No nourishment, just withering.

That’s what happens when you pour on the tough feedback all in one dose. You have to administer it a little at a time, let it sink in, and then move on to the next “watering”.

Be sincere

If it comes from the heart it sticks in the mind. You have to mean it to drive meaning; the opposite is undermining. And don’t miss the opportunity to line corrective feedback with a bedding of care. Showing up as sincerely caring about wanting to help them become better versions of themselves can make it easier for the recipients to digest the feedback.

Relatedly, a great way to show you’re sincere in your desire for them to improve is to ask for feedback yourself as a coach. Then visibly act on the feedback you’re given. Reciprocity demonstrates sincerity.

Be calibrating

People instinctively want to know the level of seriousness behind the feedback they are receiving so they can orient themselves relative to their desired path of progression. Great coaches provide this calibration. For example, let them know that the feedback they’re receiving is “not unusual at this point” if that’s the case. Or tell them that they’re “off-track at this point” if that’s the case.

Just don’t leave them guessing.

Especially since when many people hear corrective feedback, it’s all they can focus on, and they’ll assume the worst from it. They won’t remember the positive things you said.

So it’s critical that your feedback registers the message that you want it to, without room for wild interpretation.

By the way, if the next career level is a destination that’s meaningful to your coachees, they need to know if they’ve taken a step backwards in that journey. They need to be calibrated to ensure understanding of what it takes to get promoted to the next level and how their opportunity area may hold them back if not addressed.

Similarly, if they are highly ambitious, they may want to understand the gap between their performance and the “best in class” at their level.

Of course, in any scenario they also need to know that you stand ready to help them grow and get back on-track to whatever they’re aspiring to.

Another effective way to calibrate is relative to your own personal experience. If coachees needs to work on an area that you’ve also shared in the past and have successfully improved upon (even if you’re still working on it), the commonality can be calming and bonding. It’s always comforting to know “you’re not alone”, especially if the very person giving you the feedback has walked a mile in your shoes.

Be commensurate

To maximize receptivity to the message, it’s important to be proportional in the scale and amount of reinforcing and re-directive feedback you give. Don’t overstate or understate the impact of the outcome you are praising or pushing on.

And remember a fundamental human truth - we tend to do a lot more right than wrong as human beings, and want to be reminded as such. Great coaches help keep the distribution of the feedback commensurate with this reality. Research indicates a 5:1 ratio is about right - five pieces of positive feedback for every one piece of corrective feedback.

Note that this ratio changes when you have a teenage daughter. Then it’s 50 pieces of “You’re right. I don’t know anything” for every one piece of “Yes, I agree - your life is totally ruined”.

Anyway, the key is to not be sparing on the praise to share, while being discerning on the most important constructive points to discuss.

Be timely

“After the fact” feedback means “matter of fact” feedback. The feedback just won’t resonate as much and seem as sincere if too much time passes between a feedback inducing event and the sharing of the feedback itself.

Be tailored

In my experience, there are three kinds of people when it comes to receiving corrective feedback.

The first kind like to hear corrective feedback right up front, straight with no chaser. If they know such feedback is on its way, they simply won’t be able to enjoy any positive reinforcement that might precede it.

The second kind prefer “the compliment sandwich”, when you insert the corrective feedback in between two pieces of positive feedback.

The third kind say they want the first kind, but in reality want the second kind.

The point is that people vary in how they like to receive feedback, particularly constructive feedback. Being tuned in to this helps increase the quality of the experience for all.

Another powerful element of tailoring feedback comes into play when providing feedback for cross-functionals (people that work in a discipline other than yours). Great coaches connect the dots on what's important in someone's specific function to succeed, and provide positive or constructive feedback on those specific elements.

For example, whatever business you're in, it's likely true that the legal function in particular values a balance of smart risk protection and the ability to creatively advance the business. Lawyers adept at such a skill would be gratified to hear from you about this strength (and that their bosses knew your evaluation of this strength as well). Likewise, they would also appreciate you taking the time to understand what's important for success in the legal function, and helping them improve on such vital performance elements.

Since the process of giving feedback can truly be tricky and even intimidating (and done poorly can drain meaning from the occasion) here's another tool to help you navigate the course of discussion. What follows is a tailored framework for sharing feedback that I've developed and used to great effect.

THE **SHARES** FEEDBACK FRAMEWORK

- SITUATION** — describe the “state of the union”, situation, and corresponding context
- HALO** — the discussion with empathy and sincerity as you enter the next step
- ARTICULATE** — provide specifics on the performance shortfall or behavior that's caught your eye
- RESULT** — share the result it's having on you, others, the project, or desired career progression
- EXAMPLE** — give an example of an alternative behavior or desired alternative outcome
- SOLICIT** — the employee's point of view while listening to understand and empathize





Help them with their Productivity Habits

NINE: Help them with their Productivity Habits

True full potential, almost by definition, can't be achieved without full productivity.

If coachees are highly disorganized and inefficient, help them break the pattern. This may mean helping them break down their work processes and helping them break bad habits. This might involve helping them to simply get more organized, delegate more, stop procrastination, set goals, or embark on any host of productivity and efficiency building techniques.

The idea is to treat productivity strategically – as an essential part of the overall plan to unlock your coachees full potential.

Start by addressing obvious outages in productivity (like kitten memes).

On a going basis, be intentional about providing further assistance. What follows is a list of tactical suggestions you can start with.

I combed through volumes of research on how leaders can help maximize productivity for their employees and found there were 10 things most commonly cited as being big enablers. Here's the Top 10 list (in no specific order):

TOP 10 PRODUCTIVITY POWER-UPS

1) Invest in information sharing

It's difficult enough to gain competitive intelligence, why would we withhold our own? It happens far too often, by the way. How many times have you found out something too late, and thought, "It would have been nice to know that a month ago"? When we withhold information or don't make the time investment to openly share critical information, we handicap our organizations. It takes time to do so, but it's time well spent.

2) Encourage them to remove productivity pit stops¹²

There are a kajillion distractions built into our days: social media, email alerts, our favorite app, sitting in a cube that's in the middle of a high-traffic area on the floor. We often don't realize the additive effect of these interruptions. Conduct a little awareness campaign with your coachees and help kick as many distractions to the curb as you can.

3) Be enthusiastic about answering questions

The idea here is not to create a dependency where you enable a habit of coachees waiting to ask you versus finding something out for themselves. It's about encouraging them to come forth sooner versus later when they really do need help. This will help keep them out of unproductive spin mode.

4) Give 'em two breaks

By this I mean 1) encourage them to take breaks, 2) encourage them to break their time up into smaller segments and rotate tasks between the more tedious and the more engaging. Both of these tactics sound basic but there's a ton of science backing up the positive impact they'll have on productivity.

5) Help them have an email strategy

You don't need a book to tell you how unproductive email can be. Everyone has their own trick to managing email; the key is to encourage coachees to find their own. For example, I've used a team system before that's worked well – everyone on the team gets in the habit of classifying the subject header of the email: seeing IAR in the subject header means “Immediate Action Required”, AR means “Action Required”, and FYI means, well, you know.

6) Run high-powered meetings

There are two things that will be the death of us all. 1) Death. 2) Meetings. The least you can do is own the meetings you're responsible for in terms of actionability and productivity. And role modeling a highly productive meeting will encourage coachees to do the same in their own meetings.

7) Don't skimp on training

Training is always the first thing to go in the face of time or money constraints. Stay committed to providing the troops the training they need to be maximally productive.

8) Enable flexible work

Enabling flexible working arrangements is more than just a productivity help, it has become a prerogative with the millennial workforce.

9) Give them the equipment they need

Don't let slow computers and constantly jamming copy machines become an albatross to

productivity. Fight for the basic resources to help people do their job. There are also tons of productivity apps available.

And no, “Words with Friends” isn't one of them.

Experiment with a few such apps yourself, determine which ones might be helpful, and then make recommendations to your coachees.

10) Establish a Morning Power Hour

Ban all meetings from 8-9AM, for example, and establish that time slot as a power hour – when people can jump start their day by cranking things out without distractions. Science shows that 1) the most productive hour for the vast majority of us is in that first working hour after waking, and 2) when we start the day with momentum, we are much more likely to stay on a productive roll throughout the day.

BONUS

Don't forget the foundational three of productivity maximization - help them brutally prioritize, help them set timelines, and discourage multi-tasking (which science has proven actually harms productivity).

Put Career Rocket Fuel in their Tank

TEN: Put Career Rocket Fuel in their Tank

Actor Gary Sinise once said, “Careers are like rockets, they rarely take off on schedule or stay in orbit forever. The key is to keep working the engines.”

Coaches that lovingly work the engines in partnership with their people are essentially injecting career rocket fuel.

You can do this too.

There are four powerful ways you can help care for your coachees careers – what I call “The 4 Cornerstones of Career Care”.

THE 4 CORNERSTONES OF CAREER CARE

- 1) Have Crystallizing Career Conversations
- 3) Help them Shine on Game Day
- 2) Have a Marketing Plan for Showcasing
- 4) Give the Gift of Graduation Coaching their Talents

1) Have Crystallizing Career Conversations

A plan for career progression starts with understanding the employee’s career goals.

Easy, just ask them, right?

Not necessarily so.

The key is to help them identify what they want to do, not what they're supposed to want to do.

They won't always know, or they might not want to tell you for fear of it being outside typical notions of career advancement and thus "career limiting". They may fear that what they really want to do will cause you to bail on their development.

A great relationship, of course, enables the magic formula – talking about it.

HERE'S A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR GREAT CAREER CONVERSATIONS:

Challenge the notion of what they're truly passionate about

If they say they're right on track with what they want to do, great. If they reveal it's not the current career path they're on but they have a clear desired alternative, great. If they're having difficulty articulating their desired destination, it's time for introspection.

In my book *Make It Matter* I shared a series of self-questions that help reveal what one's purpose (the *Profound Why*) to their work might be. A few of these same questions are excellent at revealing where one's career passion may lie. Try these questions with your coachees:

- What are your superpowers?
- What would you do for free?
- What would you try/do if you knew you couldn't fail?
- What have been your happiest moments?
- What have you learned from career misfires and triumphs?
- What would friends say you're meant to do?
- What would Justin Bieber do?

***Author's note: one of the above is not like the others. Can you spot it?*

These questions may take some time for coachees to think about. That's OK – have them come back to discuss when they're ready.

Help them discern between short term pit stops and long term destinations

Sometimes coachees will articulate what they want to do next in their career, but not within the context of how that will lead them to where they want to go longer term. It's important that you ask them why they want to do assignment X next – will it be a stepping stone to what they ultimately want to do? The idea is to (gently) not let them off the hook for thinking through as best they can what will really make them happy in the long run.

Get clear on what it takes to get where they want to go

Ensure it's understood what skills, experiences, and other pre-requisites are needed for the next role and where they want to head in general. If they want to go in a direction outside your core area of expertise, go talk with people who are doing what your coachees want to do and learn what it takes. Put a plan on paper for how they can obtain the necessary skills and knowledge to get them where they want to go.

Discuss options without setting unrealistic expectations

Even if the next career move won't happen any time soon, your coachees will greatly appreciate the fact that you sat down to talk about the possibilities and that there's a semblance of a career plan at work.

It's critical to be transparent about which career opportunities and paths are feasible and good fits. Sometimes employees have an unrealistic view of their ability to progress in an organization – don't deny them the truth. It's the single greatest disservice you could do to your coachees. This is their life and livelihood we're talking about here, after all.

It's also important not to over promise. The last thing you want to do is create gaps between what coachees think will happen and what actually happens – that's guaranteed to create disappointment (and even resentment).

2) Have a Marketing Plan for Showcasing their Talents

Anyone in business knows you have to make a concerted effort to market and sell your products if you want those products to succeed. It requires a well thought out marketing plan with an understanding of who the target audience is, what the most compelling messages are to communicate, and how you'll trumpet those messages – via what communication vehicles and when.

It's no different when it comes to getting awareness and quality impressions for talented employees as part of their career progression plan.

The People's Marketing Plan is a tool that will help you build a comprehensive plan for showcasing your coachees talents and getting them the quality exposure they need to help "create demand" for them.

USE THE TEMPLATE THAT FOLLOWS TO HELP FRAME YOUR APPROACH.

THE PEOPLE'S MARKETING PLAN			
WHO	WHAT	HOW	WHEN

Who do we target with the exposure/messaging? **Who** are the key career influencers for

the employee? Can you identify potential career sponsors or advocates for the employee?

What messages do we want the key influencers to receive about the employee? (points of difference reinforced, performance highlights, tidbits to enhance employee's image and equity, stories of the employee's strengths brought to life, etc.)

How will we provide exposure of the employee/key employee messages to the influencers? (presentation opportunities, specially designed projects, email updates on key accomplishments, submissions in consideration for company awards, etc.)

When should the key influencers receive the exposure/messaging? Are there optimal times that would most resonate or break through the clutter (before performance review season, during a milestone meeting, during travel time with a key influencer, etc.)

Once you have the plan on paper, share it with the coachee. Again, simply knowing that there is a career plan and that it's thoughtfully and actively being worked can be extremely motivating.

3) Help Them Shine on Game Day

I wish I could tell you that impressions aren't often disproportionately formed at events like big meetings or big presentations. But in many a case that's the way of the working world.

You don't have to like it, you just have to make it more likely such events will be a big success for your coachees. Help prepare for these instances, including doing dry-runs or anticipating questions. A little coaching from someone who has been in many moments like this can go a long way – it's about being intentional and taking the time.

4) Give the Gift of Graduation Coaching

Eventually, your coachees will leave the nest to fly on to their next career challenge.

Even when that time comes, you're still not done coaching them.

This is one of those times when giving advice really does equal good coaching. Take the time to give them thoughtful advice on how to get off to a fast start and succeed in their new endeavor, carefully tailoring that advice with their strengths and opportunities in mind. Seek out their new boss and their new bosses boss and find out what they think the keys to success are for your soon-to-be former employee.

Boil all of this down to the eight most important pieces of advice you could give them and put it in a crisply written list - I call this list 8 to Make Your Great(er). Share it with them on their last day under your watch. It doesn't mean the relationship ends there, but it's a great, parting, thoughtful investment that will mean a lot to the recipients.

And it will put a stamp on a job well done in bringing out their full potential.

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