



Essence of Coaching

Context to Coaching

While practice of using mentors, guides existed for long; executive coaching in its current form has a shorter history of around 15-20 years. The origins of Coaching can be traced to the work of Timothy Gallwey who wrote in 1974 the book 'Inner game of Tennis' followed by 'Inner game of Golf', where he presented a contrarian view and brought in the aspect of absorbing the visual images as distinct from over reliance on analysis.

Since the mid-90s coaching has developed into a more independent discipline with emergence of professional associations such as the Association for Coaching, International Coach Federation and The European Coaching and Mentoring Council that have developed a set of coaching standards and ethics.

Coaching is a leadership development mechanism for business owners and top management teams and has been successfully used to help improve individual and team performance. Coaching is like a catalyst for positive change in a way that's appropriate for individuals, helping them to be at the best they can be in. To quote Tim Gallwey "Coaching is about evoking the best from people."

Business or Executive Coaching, though not wide spread, has been an established practice in large organizations and is gaining momentum in mid-sized as well promoter driven companies, to help them transform their business for better growth and profitability.

What is Coaching?

Coaching is about creating awareness in a Coachee about his/her purpose, values, strengths and possible areas of development. Unlike in consulting or counselling,

coaching does not provide a ready solution. It facilitates a process for the client to explore his/her own solutions. A Coach's job is to help him/her to get that clarity and awareness through reflection. Coaching is a self-discovery process, which helps the client in deeply assessing his/her underlying beliefs and abilities that can help an individual to realize his/her full potential.

- Coaching is all about change and transformation that a Coachee aspires, which emanates from asking right questions rather than *providing right answers*.
- Coaching is *specific, need based, time bound and measurable*.
- Coaching facilitates the exploration of needs, motivations, aspirations, skills and thought processes to assist the individual in making tangible behavioural changes that would *enhance leadership skills and competencies* together with *holistic self-improvement*. Coaching is about *reinventing oneself - creating new identities* and new futures.
- Coaching allows for continuous learning, offering support, encouragement and feedback.
- Coaching is confidential, allowing people to *freely discuss delicate issues; to shed defences; to explore blind spots* and shortcomings.
- Coaching is *individually tailored to the person* and the current issue or problem as opposed to the "one-size-fits-all" menu.

Some Key Features of Coaching

- **High client focus.** A coach always works on client's agenda, helping him to reach his/her goals
- **Process based.** While the agenda is of Client, the Coach drives the process. Though individual sessions are calibrated to the client context, the process does have a definitive framework. Key steps being - clarity of purpose, awareness, perspective validation or shift and action orientation.

- **Coaching is not training.** It's a developmental mechanism. It's a facilitative process aimed at capacity building & sustenance. Unlike consulting, mentoring or counselling, coaching does not provide a ready solution; it instead gets client initiated on a pathway with necessary clarity & self-realization to be able to find his/her own solution.
- **Non prescriptive.** It works on the conviction that most appropriate solutions come from within and that the client has the capability to find it. Coaching intervention helps improving clarity and awareness, broadening one's perspective and providing encouragement.
- **Forward orientation.** Coaching process does not much dwell on past and its analysis. It focuses on the goal post
- **Action orientation.** Coaching is not about giving knowledge; it prods client into action towards achievement of his / her goals
- **Coaching is not about functional skills.** Coaching brings about performance enhancement via changes in perspectives and behavioural pattern and therefore not domain specific.

Comparison between Coaching, Training, Mentoring and Consulting

To understand Coaching better, it can be helpful to distinguish coaching from other development interventions that provide personal or organizational support.

Training. Training is based on the premise that the trainer or instructor will impart a certain set of skills to the participants in a training course. Training programs are designed to apply to a group of people and may or may not relate directly to an individual's specific needs. In contrast, Coaching focuses completely on the individual and is tailored to a suit his or her requirements.

Mentoring. Mentoring is a process whereby someone who has *'been there done that'* shares his/her experience and guides another person in career development or assists that individual to develop capabilities to shoulder more challenging responsibilities.

Consulting. Consultants may be retained by individuals or organizations for the purpose of accessing specialized expertise. While consulting approaches vary widely, there is often an assumption that the consultant diagnoses problems and prescribes and sometimes implements solutions.

In general, the assumption with coaching is that individuals or teams are capable of generating their own solutions, with the coach supplying *supportive, discovery-based approaches and frameworks*.

Illustrative Scenario

Person X is moving from a functional head role to a business head role where he has P&L responsibility. His erstwhile colleagues and peers now report to him.

What are the implication of this change on the role in terms of skill sets & interpersonal relationships?

What are the implication of this change on the role holder?

How well does he realize this & how would he prepare for this change?

The comfort zone of a familiar space is replaced by uncharted waters. Solutions of yesterday are not valid anymore. Self-doubt and indecisiveness creeps in. He would be alone in this situation and will be unable to share his concerns with anyone. He has to learn "on the job" through trial and error". The same person who was a successful and confident functional head may be shaky and indecisive in the (changed context) new role. It is in this scenario where an external coach steps in and operates as a friend, philosopher and guide.

This happens in any transition: Internal promotion, external induction or a cross functional transfer. If this change is accompanied by a change in geographical or cross cultural setting, it only adds to the complexity of situation.