



MANAGEMENT BY COACHING

WHEN IT COMES TO LEADING, ARE YOU ENABLING OR DISABLING YOUR PEOPLE?

It was 7:00 o'clock Monday morning. Tom skipped the gym and headed into the office early so he could tackle that project he'd been trying to complete for weeks. Eager to finish before things heated up in the office, he flipped on his computer. Just as his fingers touched the keyboard, there was a knock on the door. He looked up to see Brenda – the company's top producer and his worst nightmare. Brenda was great at bringing in the

business but she was high maintenance.

That morning, she was waving her commission statement and "loaded for bear." Based on Brenda's calculation, her commissions for the month were \$1,200 short. Wanting to appease Brenda and get back to work, Tom quickly offered to talk to accounting and get the problem resolved.



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Of the three partners, Tom was known among employees as the "go-to" guy – the one you could always count on to fix the problem. Many considered him the ideal boss – always accessible, responsive and caring.

From a coaching standpoint, the opposite is true. Tom is one of the five types of leaders who stunt their people's growth rather than help them live up to their full potential. When it comes to managing your people are you a well-intentioned disabler or an enabler? Seeing if you fall into one of these five patterns of behavior will give you a pretty good idea.

The Fixer

Tom is a classic "fixer." It is a common problem for people who own or run businesses. They tend to be very effective at solving problems; it's what often gets them into the job in the first place. People like Tom see a problem and their automatic response is to fix it. This focus makes them a magnet for problems – their own and everyone else's.

From a coaching standpoint, when you solve an employee's problem for them, you take away their power and rob them of the chance to grow. Problems are always an opportunity to learn or

strengthen skills. When people solve a problem themselves, their confidence increases. You foster independence rather than their dependence on you. In coaching many agency owners/managers, one of the most frequent frustrations I hear is, "I wish my people would just take some initiative and be more proactive in solving problems."

Like it or not we live in a society where people are increasingly looking to others to solve their problems. If you want people to be more self-reliant and take more initiative, you need to be disciplined. Next time someone comes to you with a problem, empower them to solve it for themselves. In the case of Brenda, Tom could have recommended that she go talk to accounting and work it out for herself.

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The Empathizer

Kristen had recently been promoted to a manager. She knew the technical side of the business inside and out; but she was having a tough time managing her staff. Her people were constantly coming to her with complaints ranging from

the increase in workload to the decrease in the benefits package. Raised by a single working mom herself, Kristen knew the challenges of working long hours and meeting expenses at home. She really empathized with her staff and the constant complaining was draining her energy. Morale in her department was rapidly declining.

Empathy is a critical skill in coaching employees. But when the empathy is so strong that you get in the hole with the employee, you lose your perspective and ability to help the person get out. In my coaching experience, this is a challenge for many women. That's not to say that we should stop having empathy for people; empathy is what helps us connect. The key to enabling people is practicing what's called detached empathy. The trick is using your empathy to understand how the person is feeling and then quickly detaching yourself. When you detach, you have the perspective and judgment to help the person shift their thinking and get beyond the problem.

The Appeaser

"He's such a nice guy." That's how everyone always described Jim – a sales manager with a large regional brokerage firm. Jim was

just one of those people who got along with everyone. That's probably why few producers ever quit and everyone got along so well.

But there was a downside to all that congeniality. Jim avoided confrontation like the plague. When there was a problem, Jim would procrastinate forever about having the tough conversation. When producers failed to make the necessary follow-up calls, he'd let it slide as long as their overall production numbers for the month were ok. Unless it was a major problem, Jim's philosophy was not to rock the boat.

Managers like Jim are almost always well-liked by their people but they never get the best out of them. Their desire to be liked leads them to give people what they want rather than what they need. That approach would work reasonably well if most people were self-motivated. But the reality is we're not. The vast majority of us need a push and a fair amount of tough love to perform at our best.

Research consistently shows that the most successful companies in terms of both results and attracting top-notch talent are cultures where expectations are high and people are held accountable. Management is not about being

liked, it is about caring enough for people to help them achieve their full potential.

The Martyr

Ellen was probably the hardest working manager in the office – always the first to arrive and the last to leave. Files were stacked high on her desk and her email inbox was constantly full. At weekly manager meetings, she was always the one with the lion's share of projects. A five-a-day Diet Coke drinker, there were dark circles under her eyes; she resented her workload and felt ready to explode.

Ellen really cared about her work; many labeled her a perfectionist. In her pursuit of perfection, she had a strong need for control. At her core, Ellen believed that if she wanted to be sure something was done right she needed to do it herself. That belief made her the willing victim of the company's heavy workload.

Bosses like Ellen not only hurt themselves, they hurt everyone in their departments. Their workload is so heavy and their stress so high, that they don't have time for coaching their people. They tend to handle the tough projects and situations themselves so the people

around them have fewer learning and growth opportunities.

When they do delegate, the need for perfection and control leads them to micromanage their people. People aren't given the freedom to learn for themselves and make mistakes – which is how we grow.

If you are like Ellen, the first step in changing this behavior is understanding how much it costs you personally and the negative impact it has on your people. The key is getting in the habit of delegating and giving people the breathing room to handle projects their way. Recognize your need for control but rather than controlling every aspect of the work, focus on setting up clear parameters for the project and monitoring it at critical points along the way.

The Under-Estimator

Jack was a third generation owner of a thriving New England-based company. Many of the firm's employees had been with the company for years. The firm had a longstanding tradition of treating employees like family.

Jack's dad had always impressed upon him the importance of taking care of your people. In

return, Jack expected his people be loyal, give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, and follow directions. As much as Jack liked his people, he didn't see them as capable of doing more than that.

In the past, whenever he tried to get his people to brainstorm, they didn't come up with any good ideas. Jack concluded that finding ways to improve operations, grow the business and deliver better customer service was his job; theirs' was to execute. Because his two attempts at brainstorming didn't produce ideas he liked, Jack assumed his people couldn't do more. As a result, they never did.

Research consistently shows that when you set high expectations for people, performance increases. When you set low expectations, performance drops. Consider the experiment of two high school classes. One teacher was given two classes – both comprised of students with comparable IQs. She was told that the students in class A were high-performing students with above average IQ's and the students in class B were average

students. Guess which class had the higher test scores at the end of the semester. If you want to help your people live up to their full potential, set your expectations high.

Bringing out the best in your people begins with taking a long hard look at yourself. Your behaviors, as well as the limiting beliefs and assumptions you make about others, can play a critical role in holding people back or inspiring them to rise to challenge.

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