



CUTTINGS

Number 77 December 2008

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The Coaching Conundrum

A study by BlessingWhite Inc. found an unexpected ambivalence to coaching among companies across the world.

According to the report, there are frequent claims in organisation mission statements and annual reports that managers' coaching has an impact on the business as well as on employee engagement and talent management, but the truth is that very few have actually created a culture where the coaching of employees is a best practice that's fully supported and rewarded.

BlessingWhite's coaching practice leader Cathy Earley comments: "Our study presents a puzzling picture of good intentions, missed opportunities and conflicting messages about the importance of employees being coached by their managers."

Regionally, 65% of managers in the U.S.A. and Canada believe coaching leads to bottom line

business results, with the U.K. and Ireland trailing the survey with 63%. This compares with 71% for their continental European colleagues, and 74% in Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

Some of the disparities identified between the objectives and reality of coaching by managers:

- Most managers say they love to coach and most employees like to be coached, but only half of respondents in North America and Asia and even fewer in Europe get coaching.
- Organisations, managers and employees believe in coaching's contribution to their success, but managers say they do not spend enough time coaching.
- While managers are expected to coach, only one-quarter have compensation tied to coaching.
- While managers who coach regularly describe the tangible benefits, coaching is still viewed

as supplementary to a manager's core responsibilities.

- Managers worry about whether they have all the answers, while employees do not want advice but to be stretched and helped in sorting through problems.
- Organisations and managers talk a great deal about coaching skills or processes, but the essential contributor to effective coaching is a trusting and supportive relationship.

This report supports the belief that managers need to stop thinking of coaching as an event to be scheduled after one's own work is done or as a means of dealing with a performance issue. Instead, managers need to adopt coaching as a daily leadership practice and focus on creating a supportive environment for their teams.

The Coaching Conundrum Report
www.blessingwhite.com/cc_report.asp

Dodging the Question

We hear question-dodging in TV interviews, political debates and in meetings—but do we mind? New HBS research by Todd Rogers and Michael Norton looks at what they call "conversational blindness".

There were two findings that are most interesting. First, people often failed to notice and punish the speaker when he dodged the question asked. This lack of penalty might explain why overt dodging appears so prevalent.

The second—and potentially more troubling—finding is that people prefer, trust, and like a question-dodger who is smooth and sounds confident over a question-answerer who is not smooth and

stammers. So, we seem to value style over substance.

What makes conversational blindness so common is that listening is much more taxing than we might think. It requires that we hear and comprehend each phrase, relate each phrase to the last, fill in implied components of what's being said, and observe and integrate non-verbal signals. So, conversational blindness may occur in part because conversations are continuous and leave little time for people to reflect on how every statement links to each previous statement. And it is also more pleasant to engage and go with the flow of a conversation than to keep to the initial topic.

So, if this is so common, how can we get the information we really need? If you immerse yourself in trying to understand the nuance of what the speaker is saying, you may lose track of your original question. So if you want an answer, you need to make sure the speaker provides one. In the UK, Jeremy Paxman famously repeated the same question 12 times in a TV interview [www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkIT7Qy07Is]. In the first US presidential debate Jim Lehrer was a little more subtle—after several minutes of "answers" he followed up with, "All right, let's go back to my question."

HBS Working Knowledge

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Snippets

A bumper collection of thought provokers and quotations for the festive season...

Starting with some very topical ones...

- ✂ "I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies. If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks and corporations that will grow up around [the banks] will deprive the people of all property until their children wake-up homeless on the continent their fathers conquered. The issuing power should be taken from the banks and restored to the people, to whom it properly belongs." *Thomas Jefferson*
 - ✂ "When the times get tough, the last thing companies should do is make sacrifices on the human side. You should do the exact reverse. When times get tough, it's the leaders that you have that are going to carry you through it." *Jerry Grandey, CEO Cameco, RSA*
 - ✂ *The leadership style of Barack Obama:* In listening to two hours of CNN the night after the election here are a few of the words various people used to describe him: Competitive; Winner; In touch with his people; Smart Intelligent; Calm; Gracious; Trusted; Empowering; Inspiring; Respected; Honest; Knows it's not about him; Visionary; Great communicator.
 - ✂ "If you're walking down the right path and you're willing to keep walking, eventually you'll make progress." *Barack Obama*
- And then some others ...
- ✂ "There are no new truths, but only truths that have not been recognised by those who have perceived them without noticing. A truth is something that everybody can be shown to know and to have known, as people say, all along." *Mary McCarthy*
 - ✂ "If I just looked at the crowd, I would never start" *Mother Theresa*

- ✂ Employees who responded more positively to Gallup's Q12 also worked in business units with higher levels of productivity, profit, retention, and customer satisfaction." *Buckingham & Coffman*
- ✂ "There is no abstract art. You must always start with something. Afterward you can remove all traces of reality." *Pablo Picasso*
- ✂ "What helps luck is a habit of watching for opportunities, of having a patient, but restless mind, of sacrificing one's ease or vanity, of uniting a love of detail to foresight, and of passing through hard times bravely and cheerfully." *Charles Victor Cherbuliez*
- ✂ "The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination." *John Schaar*
- ✂ There's an old story about Arthur Rubenstein, the famous concert pianist. After a particularly stirring performance, a woman comes up to Rubenstein and exclaims, "That was wonderful! I'd give my life to be able to play like that." And he looks her in the eye and simply answers, "I did."
- ✂ When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life so that when you die the world cries and you rejoice. *Navajo chant used to open this year's International Coach Federation Annual Conference.*
- ✂ "The nights are pregnant and no one knows the day that will be born" *Turkish proverb*
- ✂ "If you want to know what's really going on in most companies, you talk to the guy who sweeps the floors. Nine times out of ten, he knows more than the president." *Kenneth Hendricks*
- ✂ "Suppose we were able to share meanings freely without a compulsive urge to impose our view or to conform to those of others and without distortion and self-deception. Would this not constitute a real revolution in culture?" *David Bohm*

- ✂ "It is your work in life that is the ultimate seduction." *Picasso*
- ✂ "Who hath not served cannot command." *John Florio, 1578*
- ✂ "I am trying to think of good leaders who haven't been good communicators and I can't think of one." *Rev Chaffey, RAF*
- ✂ "Listening is much more taxing than we might think." *Todd Rogers*
- ✂ "People don't hate change, they hate how you're trying to change them" *Michael Kanazawa*

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