

05/07/2003

Tips on being a good coach

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WHETHER it is winning a competitive sports, reaching the summit of a mountain, or achieving flying colours in an examination, very few succeed entirely on his or her own.

Often these people and many others who have achieved significant measures of success have had plenty of help along the way. Aspiring individuals or teams have people who play the "behind-the-scene" roles to perform some forms of coaching role. They either act directly as coaches for them, or indirectly performing coach roles as bosses, teachers, personal advisors, mentors, confidante and many others.

Often these coach-leaders have gone through the "terrains" of experiences themselves and are therefore highly competent to offer much invaluable support to those who come after them.

The sports arena, both locally and internationally, are full of examples of former sports champions lending their experiences to help others reach or surpass their own personal level of accomplishments.

Similarly, there are many shining examples in the non-sports arenas as well. Close to our hearts is our beloved Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who can be well regarded as Malaysia's No. 1 Coach. Few would dispute that he is the man behind many of the country's achievements.

Great coaches are like "co-pilots", who sit closely next to an aspiring individual, a team or a nation of people, guiding them while they navigate along rough terrains of experiences to reach success and happiness.

On its own, hard work does not necessarily get us anywhere. Neither is sheer bull-like determination or persistence.

So despite having fine human qualities, efforts channelled and expended in the wrong direction and doing the wrong things will lead to little progress.

There's also this saying that 'working smart is better than working hard'.

Good advice helps to keep us aware on where we are heading in order not to end up the wrong way. When the matter is complex and very important, an external person whose role is "outside looking in" is effective in offering new ideas, new perspectives and new information to increase our chances of success.

Here is where the experienced coach plays a pivotal role; lending a helping hand to guide and realign people to take the right path in the journey to attain the desired goals in life.

Why is the human mind important to the coach? As mentioned in the last article that simply possessing a large quantity of subject matter is insufficient to help others achieve success.

What is most important is the quality of helping relationship which is deemed to be the single most important factor in determining the success of a coaching experience.

Essentially, a good helping relationship hinges on how well a coach can understand and empathise with the attitude and behaviour of a person, and also the ability to draw the connection to the internal goings-on in the mind of the person.

With a deep understanding, the coach will be able to adjust the "lenses" inside the mind for it to perceive and interpret the world correctly to yield the desired result. Thus, the point of focus for all good coaches is

the human mind. This is the hot seat of thoughts, attitudes and beliefs which determines the habits, actions and behaviour of people.

The role of a coach is similar to that of a surgeon in an operating theatre. He has to thoroughly examine the human mind to find out what is inside there first. Then he unlocks it to rid off what should not be there, and later relocks it after it is ready to receive new information and perspectives about its personal self and the world outside. Only when this is done successfully, can aspiring people reach the desired state of their accomplishments.

Fundamentally, a good coach must have a good grasp of human psychology. Firstly, the coach must be fully aware that beliefs, habits and behaviour are learnt with the help of the environment.

Secondly, these can also be unlearnt either by themselves or with the help of others.

Thirdly, they can be re-learnt again with new beliefs, attitudes and behaviour.

Such strong conviction is very important for coaches, for without it, coaching will be non-existent and any effort to change people will be a mission in futility!

There is sufficient track record to prove this true. It would never have been possible for Cathy Freeman to win an Olympic gold for she is an aborigine raised from the deprived Australian outback.

We would never have heard of Albert Einstein for he was mentally slow as a child, or Abraham Lincoln, who was a lethargic day dreamer or Thomas Edison, a "hopeless case" in his early years.

But they all became great people because they knew there was hope within them and refused to let their original environments sealed their fate forever as useless human beings.

As Dr William James, a well respected Harvard psychologist confirms, "The greatest discovery of my time was that human being can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of minds".

It goes to say that what happens to you in life is not accidental. It is a direct or indirect result of how you think and what you want to do. With this conviction, a good coach can help reset one's life for the better.

What is it about the human mind the coach is after? Although sports coaches have existed for hundreds of years, non-sports coaches have in recent years, become increasingly a great part of many people's lives. The many demands of modern living exert great pressures on people to perform well to be successful and happy with their lives. This includes the school children of today who are attending many more hours of personal tuition, a direct result of what they (and often their parents as well), want out of their lives.

In helping people to be better and happier, the first logical thing a coach does is ask a very important strategic question, "What is really going on inside you?". This is the starting point to describe the self-image as the person sees himself.

Like a creative advertising idea that helps to crystallise the final advertising artwork, the self-image is also a personal idea which immensely influences habits and behaviour of people.

Take for instance, when someone has fears in public speaking. The coach must find out the real reason for such fears.

On examining the mind, he discovers that the main reason for this fear is due to the belief that he will make lots of mistakes. Predictably, he shuns such assignments, and when he has to do it, he feels very nervous and uncomfortable doing it.

The next step is to lock on to identify where and what are the types of "scotomas" or "blind spots" which are inhibiting him from developing

greater confidence and skills to do this.

The following question to ask is whether being a good public speaker is crucial to him in attaining his long-term goal in life, say, to be a successful lawyer.

If it is, then the coach has succeeded in unlocking the person's mind to accept new learning, new information, new truths and new perspectives for his mind.

By pushing further into this, the coach makes him accept self-accountability by glueing him to his goals. This will motivate him to unlearn old ideas and relearn new ones which are now aligned to the goals he wants to attain.

The coach has therefore succeeded in this last step; he has relocked his mind with new materials. However, it is not the end yet for the person has to be monitored; for each time he falters, he has to be reminded again and again on his goals.

Given the time, positive changes will set in and will become a permanent part of his beliefs, attitudes, habits and behaviour.

In other words, he will not fear public speaking any more and should be on his way to be a good speaker and a successful lawyer as well.

The ultimate goal of good coaches lies in helping to empower an otherwise powerless individual to move into positive transformational mode. It is the change in the person's self-image which he is trying to get at.

When he succeeds in this, he will be able to get the person to change his total internal and external behavioural system with much ease. This is the most satisfying part of a coach's mission; for he has won the battle with the human mind!

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