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Coaching Skills for Leaders: Seven Habits That Make a Difference

Earlier this month, I wrote a blog post citing Google's research on the eight habits of highly effective Google bosses. The results indicated that **Being a Good Coach** was #1 on Google's list of qualities and behaviors that set the best Google bosses apart from the pack. That coaching was #1 was not a surprise to me. I've witnessed coaching's effectiveness.

Research done by Zenger and Folkman (authors of **The Extraordinary Leader**) also indicate that the effectiveness of a manager's coaching impacts employee turnover (the better the coach, the lower the turnover) and improves employee engagement (the better the coach, the more engaged the employee). Neither of these results was a surprise to me, either.

Coaching (both external and internal) represents one of the most significant trends in leadership development within organizations in the last 25 years. According to Kathleen Stinnett, fellow Hudson Institute Coach and author of the book, **The Extraordinary Coach** with John Zenger, leaders with a coaching mindset believe they can get more done by growing their employees and gaining commitment rather than by controlling or directing. Leaders who utilize the skills of great coaches make individuals and teams perform better, lead to better retention and engagement and drive bottom line results.

Coaching is about growth and the future. Stinnett says, "Coaching conversations should move the coachee forward, whether in thought or in action, in relation to the coaching issue(s) being discussed." Coaching is an agenda for change.

Your role as a leader/coach is to be a Partner or a Champion with a focus on promoting the future growth and development of your direct reports. When coaching is done right, your coachees walk away feeling inspired, empowered and enabled to act.

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Leader/Coaches: Your Self-Assessment

So if effective coaching makes a difference for employees and organizations, what are some of the keys to being a great leader/coach? Utilizing my experience and training along with the core competencies of the International Coach Federation, I've identified seven habits of effective leader/coaches along with some questions to help you assess where you stand.



1. Ability to create trust, be fully present and connect

Ask yourself: What is the environment that I create for my employees? Safe and supportive? How do I display my honesty and integrity in day to day dealings with my colleagues and direct reports? Do I show respect for each individual's perspectives? How do I "show up" during our conversations? Am I distracted and unfocused or do I remain open and flexible to the individual, able to create a connection that is the foundation for our work?

2. Ability to listen attentively

Ask yourself: How do I listen? Do I display active listening skills like summarizing, mirroring back and paraphrasing? Do I listen for what's *not* being said? Do I listen without my own agenda in mind, focusing on their concerns, goals, values or beliefs?

3. Ability to ask powerful questions

Ask yourself: What is the value of my questions? Are they open ended? Do they create greater clarity, possibility or new learning, connecting the employee with the issue? Do my questions display my active listening? Do my questions bring about discovery, insight, commitment or action? Where appropriate, do they challenge my employee's assumptions?

4. Ability to communicate effectively

Ask yourself: How effective and clear am I in providing feedback? Do I help my employees clarify their goals and objectives? Do I help my employees by reframing or looking at an issue from another perspective?

5. Ability to create awareness

Ask yourself: How do I help my employees discover *for themselves* the new thoughts, beliefs and perceptions that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what's important to them? How do I help them interpret multiple sources of information and achieve results? To see different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors?



6. Ability to facilitate the design of actions, creation of plans and setting of goals

Ask yourself: How do I help my employees establish goals and action plans that encourage stretch and challenge yet set a comfortable pace of learning? Do I encourage them to explore alternative ideas and solutions? Do I help them develop goals that are specific, attainable and measurable and have target dates? How do I incorporate opportunities to practice and employ concepts learned and discussed during our coaching conversations?

7. Ability to manage progress and accountability

Ask yourself: How do I hold my employees accountable for their desired progress. Do I acknowledge successes and learning? Do I positively confront my employees when they do not take their agreed upon actions? How do I promote my coachee's self discipline?

Just like any skill set, these seven habits can grow and strengthen over time with focus, practice and commitment to achieving your desired results. Take one or two habits, and work to make them part of your regular conversations. Grow your coaching skill set. One CPA firm I'm working with has selected coaching as a targeted leadership development growth area for its firm leaders. Given the outcomes that organizations are experiencing when leaders become effective coaches, it's worth the time, effort and commitment.

About the Author: **Mary C. Werner, CPA, MOD** is the founder of *Werner Coaching and Consulting, Inc.*, a firm that builds on her more than 25 years of accounting, business and financial consulting experience. Mary is a certified executive coach and provides coaching to individuals and teams as well as organizational development consulting to facilitate individual and organizational change efforts. For more information, visit www.wernercoaching.com or contact Mary directly at Mary@wernercoaching.com