



## Challenging Times Call For New Leadership Coaching Strategies

*In an ever-changing business environment, leadership must be adaptable and able to make value-driven, collaborative decisions. That means coaching strategies must adapt as well.*

- By Ingrid Johnson

Volatile, and increasingly diverse and globalized, the business environment seems like a bubbling cauldron of constant change. Between technological advances, globalization, and market volatility, the competitive field has become unpredictable and changes course rapidly. Leadership development is now a critical strategy for ensuring current and future leaders are ready to perform collaboratively. The days when leadership was defined by single, rogue decision-maker who tightly controlled most of the decision-making power and made instinctive, gut-based decisions are gone. It is a connected world in which effective leadership must have the ability to collaborate, manage networks of people and diverse groups, and recognize and develop talent potential. As leadership requirements change, so must coaching engagements. Like modern leadership, coaching can only deliver full value when it coaches by taking into account the networks and diversity of stakeholders and perspectives the leader must develop.

The image of the powerful leader in the C-suite ivory tower making tough decisions through instinct creates an out-of-touch picture of leadership best suited for the twentieth century. The love of power and control is not a good fit for today's environment in which the best way to compete is through collaboration and networking. Yet those still adhering to the "Great Man" theory, in which the lone wolf leader drives decisions, may have trouble working within a collaborative world where all stakeholders have the power to make or break a business. In fact, there are leading corporations today having trouble finding the right leadership for top positions because so many of the movers and shakers are used to making decisions alone and do not fully understand the connectivity in the marketplace. The result is a parade of top executives who come and go, leaving little behind except confusion and disarray.

### Creating a Flow of Development

Coaching engagements continue to be one-on-one but the coach must factor in the organizational context. For example, everyone has a manager and even the CEO must answer to the Board of Directors. Effective coaching takes into account the expectations of other



stakeholders as to what coaching should achieve within the framework of the organization's strategic goals. Other stakeholders may include board members, Human Resources, senior managers, and other key people or functions responsible for aligning goals with strategies. Coaching engagements are now expected to impact business results through effective leadership development. In a flow-through scenario, the coach helps the leader develop the knowledge and skills needed to impact ongoing business results in a networked environment, requiring well-developed collaborative skills and the ability to thoughtfully respond to rapid marketplace changes.

Another aspect of coaching designed for the current business environment is that coached leadership must learn how to develop high potentials within the organization and in turn serve as a coach. There is often discussion about the need for succession planning or the legacy leaders leave behind when retiring or leaving for other reasons. Has the person being coached developed a pipeline of leadership that can fill critical leadership roles and sustain the business in the future? Coaches must be regarded as a business process that drives business outcomes now and in the future.

What types of business outcomes are measurable? A good example is the leader's ability to develop talent. If coaching is successful, the business outcome could be a strengthened talent management process leading to increased talent retention. If the leader needs to develop competencies in customer relationship management, the coaching process could lead to the strengthening of the customer service process and the business outcomes is increased customer retention. Clearly, these kinds of strategic goals and processes should not be established strictly between the coach and the leader, which is precisely why there must be critical stakeholder input into the process in terms of goal setting, organizational needs, and expected business outcomes.

### **Blocking Out the Noise**

The coaching process is a change process that teaches leaders how to develop mindfulness to give them the ability to focus only on what is important and block out the "noise." One of the disadvantages of a highly connected marketplace is that numerous distractions exist. For example, social media is an excellent tool for connecting with customers, but the organization also has to find a way to ensure it is responding as a business to its true customers or stakeholders and not to a group that can inject issues only because of technology. Best practices in coaching also help leaders develop techniques for managing unconscious bias, developing a global mindset, and becoming nimble and agile in response to market changes.



The changing nature of the workforce and diversity among leaders has added yet another complexity to the coaching process. These factors support the idea that organizational context matters. How leaders interact with others matters because managers have come out of the proverbial ivory towers. CEOs regularly meet and mingle with their workforces. People within the organization who are not comfortable assuming that kind of responsibility are not likely to become leaders within the organization on any level.

At Proctor & Gamble (P&G), coaching builds a talent pipeline by teaching key people how to coach. That is quite different from the previous coaching strategies in which development stopped with the coachee. The company's business leaders coach younger managers, passing on the skills they developed through coaching relationships and education programs. Genentech, a biotechnology company founded in 1976, has also turned to coaching as a way to create an innovative organization that could grow, change, and evolve in response to marketplace changes. The company implemented the Personal Excellence Programme, which directs resources into one-on-one coaching in a way that enables a wide group (over 400 people) the ability to take advantage of coaching. The organization benefits from greater employee engagement and a filled talent pipeline that is self-sustaining.

These best practices reflect the strategic advantages a properly designed coaching program brings. The marketplace has changed, and the approach to coaching needs to change with it. Coaching can increase the ability of a business to create value by leveraging its connections. This corporate approach is the future of coaching.

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