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COACHING THE COACH

In my opinion, many people totally underestimate the impact the Coach or the Sales Manager has on their team. Of course, they expect the Coach to create strategy and prepare the team, but I believe, few people understand how much the Coach is the catalyst for whether the team consistently wins or loses. On the other side of the coin, I know that many Coaches are all too aware of the lack of impact they often have on the team's performance. They fall into the old trap many of us do to try and get peak performance from ourself or from others. If what we are doing isn't working, we do more of it, or we do it harder. This sounds silly, but if we knew what would make a difference, we would do it.

Peak Performance

Firstly, let's look at peak performance. At the risk of stating the obvious, peak performance is just that, a peak of performance. A spike, which stands out from the expected performance. In other words, you require an extraordinary effort from that person to achieve a significant result. And the other resulting fact of this spike, is that once they have developed the ability to achieve that spike, they then have the ability to lift their on-going performance to a higher level.

But peak performance takes a spurt of concentrated energy combined with a laser focus. It takes application of skill and utter determination. And, as we usually believe we are already doing our best, it takes something out of the ordinary to motivate that person or team to make that much of an extra effort. Because you have to dig deep into your reserves, reserves you're not sure you have, to find the extra required of you.

The Two Styles of Coaching

I have discovered that there are two ways to Coach people to peak performance, through

what I call 'pushing' or 'pulling'. And to be able to apply the correct style, you have to understand what is going to motivate each individual to make the extra effort, which will drive them forward to achieve the spike of peak performance.

The 'Push' Style

This is the most common form of Coaching, in both business and sport. We assume that if the person is fit, intelligent enough to follow instructions and understands what strategy is in play, this combination should work. And so when that person lags behind what you expect, or doesn't play the way you expect them to, most Coaches simply yell louder and push harder. We tell them what we want them to do, or not do. We tell them what is expected of them. As the pressure increases to get that spike of performance, so the intensity of our instructions increases. We point out that we will be disappointed if they can't make it happen, that they will be letting down their fellow team members. We threaten them with the possibility of losing their job or their place in the team. The Coach is not feeling good, nor is the person being coached.

In business, many Sales Managers are reluctant to go further or put on more pressure, in fear of de-motivating the person and the team. No such fear in sports. Most times, as the game progresses and the clock is ticking, they simply yell louder and louder. Screaming the instructions and clearly demonstrating their obvious frustration. I suspect that, unknowingly, some Coaches find that works, because some of the players in the team want to please the Coach. And seeing his or her disappointment is enough of a spur to motivate them to achieve the spike. Despite appearances, it was the 'pull' style of Coaching which just worked well with these players.

But at the end of the game, the Coach is totally unaware of which of his or her strategies were the actual catalysts for that peak of performance. Therefore they can not consciously repeat it. They continue to push as hard as they can, and hope that they get the same result. In the end, they will retain the players who respond to the 'push' motivation and lose the potentially valuable people who would respond to the 'pull' style. Or the majority of the players will prefer another style of Coaching and manipulate the Coach out of the job.

Using the 'push' technique, you will hear them say, "Run faster!" "Don't pass that way!" "How many times do I have to tell you to keep your eye on the ball!" "You're throwing like a girl!" After all, if yelling isn't working, a few good old insults might fire the person up. If they are not performing, we simply push them harder. But many Coaches know to their detriment, that, while that might work with some people some of the time, sometimes it doesn't work at all.

And unfortunately, many inexperienced Coaches in the workplace emulate what they can see happening in the sports field. They urge the person to do more, put in more effort. Go harder, make more calls, try harder.

The 'Pull' Style

In sport, once a person has the skill and the fitness, and in business, the skills and the systems, the last piece of the puzzle is to identify the motivation required, and apply it. It may be the 'push' style which is needed, but many individuals within teams, respond better to the 'pull' style. In fact, my observations are that rebellious people, and the more mature members of the team, may respond well to the 'pull' style. This not only results in achieving that elusive peak of performance, but noticeably increases the motivation of the person.

An example of the 'pull' style of Coaching is adding an incentive that the person would want to get. For example, a player being told that if he wins the game, the Coach will shout him and his family for an overnight stay at a luxury resort. But if he loses, he will have to pay for the Coach and his family to stay overnight at the luxury resort. Ouch! If applied to the right person, this method will make the person so determined to win, that skill alone will not be able to beat them.

I saw a great example of the 'pull' style of Coaching applied in water polo in the qualification tournament for the Olympics. The last thing the Coach said before the team went out to play, was to remind the players that if they lost this game, they would lose funding and sponsorship, to the tune of \$20,000 for each player. Now that's a strong 'pull' to win the game! And they did.

In business, I've seen teams put in extremely long hours, and extraordinary effort to win bottles of champagne, which they could simply go out and buy for themselves. I've even seen teams exceeding any results their manager could have dreamed for them, in order to win a chocolate fish. A chocolate-covered marshmallow fish which cost 5c. But it was the accompanying ceremony which made the prize so desirable. It was being seen to be winning which worked for some of those teams.

The 'pull' style is often found in business, and most often in sales departments. Unfortunately, most companies badly misunderstand incentives. They decide what they want from the team, and design a system which will get them where they want to be. And then they add what they "think" the sales people will want. What most companies don't appreciate, is that achieving the company budget or goals, is usually motivating for the company, not for the sales people.

Believe it or not, other companies set an incentive to achieve the basic requirements of the job. They don't appreciate that the job should be done, and an incentive is to get your people to go that extra distance.

But the paradox of motivation in business is, that while the company may have an incentive scheme in place, often the only style the Sales Manager knows is to 'push' his or her team. And it is exactly this style which may de-motivate some of his team.

Understanding their hot buttons

I'm not advocating one style as being better than the other. What I'm suggesting is that as a Coach, you are responsible for finding out enough about the individuals in your team, to identify their hot buttons. And sometimes this is quite a challenging task, as many people have not really identified what they want in life. This is why goal setting is so important in both business and

sport. We have turned whole sales teams around, simply by insisting that the Sales Manager do goal-setting sessions with their people.

Once you know what they want, and sometimes more importantly, what they don't want or what they fear, only then can you consciously coach them in the style which will result in peak performance. Without this knowledge, you can try with hit and miss, and hope for the best.

There is a lot of rubbish spoken about inspiration and motivation. And it is a valuable skill to be able to get below the surface and lead the person to identify what they really want. Which is why I dedicated a complete chapter on the subject in my first book, *Team Play*.

The Emotional Intelligence of the Coach

There is one more trap for Coaches to be aware of. Emotional Intelligence is the ability to control your emotions in order to be able to think clearly under pressure. This ability is able to be trained in people, I have just proven this with a young male sports team. However, if the Coach has low emotional intelligence, as the pressure of the game intensifies, so will his or her reactions. He or she will stop thinking and simply react to what they are seeing happening. This is when the Coach is most likely to resort to their most natural style of Coaching, which in most cases is the 'push'. So they will shout louder, scream more instructions, and spend their time with their players telling them what not to do.

In the heat of the game, or at the time when you really need to get budget, this is the time you need to apply the right style of coaching to the right person. You might strongly urge the whole team, you might blast one or two players for doing something stupid in the heat of the game, but you also need to tempt one or two players with the 'pull' style of coaching.

A Coach needs to develop the ability to 'play' each of his team members and it is only this way that the Coach can get the best out of his or her team to achieve that illusive peak performance. And only when that Coach understands and analyses his or her impact on the individuals within the team, can they consciously continue to apply the correct style again and again.

So if your team is not performing to the best of its ability, look at two issues. Does the person have the required skills? And does the Coach have a flexible coaching style to suit the whole team? In order to achieve peak performance for the team, you may have to Coach the Coach.

Please recycle me. Pass me on to colleagues and clients.