



PARTNERSHIP COACHING

Effective coaching is one of the highest leverage activities available to leaders today for improving individual and group learning and performance. Developing partnerships with those we coach builds trust and respect and increases creativity and rigor in our collaborative thinking. Partnership coaching, which employs the groundbreaking “Inner Game” principles developed by Tim Gallwey, enables coaches to develop true partnerships and helps individuals reduce performance-inhibiting interference.

Partnership coaching offers an alternative to managing and teaching. Its purpose is to facilitate learning, improve performance, and enable learners to create desired results. Using this model, managers help people achieve what they want rather than tell them what they need to accomplish or know. How? Managers (1) ask open-ended questions that focus the learner’s attention on relevant details, (2) create an environment that reduces interference, or negative self-talk by the learner, and (3) make feedback “edible”; easier for the learner to hear and use.

How to Give “Edible” Feedback

“Edible” feedback consists of nonjudgmental questions and suggestions that are easy for the learner to hear and to act on. The questions help raise the learner’s awareness of his or her goals and current reality, focus the learner’s attention, lead to deeper and more expansive thinking by the learner, and are open-ended (who, what, when, where, why, and how) rather than closed (yes/no). The suggestions add only what is necessary to complete the learner’s understanding and clarity. Here is a model for offering edible feedback:

“John/Jane, I observed your meeting/conversation/presentation/etc. I have some feedback that you might find useful . . . is now a good time? Before I give you my thoughts, I’m interested in your perceptions, specifically:

1. What worked well for you during that presentation/meeting/conversation?
2. What didn’t work as well for you?
3. What might you want to consider doing differently next time?
4. Would you like me to offer suggestions that have occurred to me as we’ve been talking?”

The coach is now in a position to confirm the perceptions of the learner or add a different perspective. Clear, nonjudgmental observations about what worked, what didn’t work as well, and what the person might do differently next time will be welcomed and more likely used for improved performance next time.

Effective Questions

- Are nonjudgmental—this requires a neutral tone of voice and facial expression and curiosity rather than criticism—and are open-ended
- Raise awareness of the learner’s goals and current reality
- Reduce interference by focusing the learner’s attention
- Lead to deeper questions and more reflective and expansive thinking by the learner
- Surface assumptions and mental models not seen before
- Are not manipulative or asked in order to help the learner arrive at a “correct” solution or answer

TRADITIONAL VS. PARTNERSHIP COACHING

ASPECT	TRADITIONAL COACHING	PARTNERSHIP COACHING
Communication Mode	Telling instructions	Asking questions
Interference/Negative “Self-Talk”	Likely to increase	Likely to decrease
Feedback	Critical, coach-focused	Nonjudgmental, learner-focused
Types of questions from coach	Yes/No	Open-ended (“who, what, when, where, how, why”)
Motivation	Extrinsic	Intrinsic
Focus	On the teacher/teaching	On the learner/learning
Purpose	To get the task done, and to share the coach’s wisdom	To develop the learner’s ability, and to access the learner’s wisdom

This material is drawn from “Partnership Coaching” by Diane Cory and Rebecca Bradley, THE SYSTEMS THINKER™, Vol. 9 No. 4 (May 1998). © 2000 Diane Cory and Rebecca Bradley. An expanded version of this “Toolbox” is available in a pocket-guide format; for information, go to www.pegasus.com.