

coaching

# Extraordinary leadership — the result of authentic effort:

*recurring challenges for executives in personal and business coaching interventions*

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**ABSTRACT:** To be of any value, the starting point for leadership coaching should be the pursuit of living authentically, making considered choices and taking responsibility for their consequences. Real leadership involves genuine interaction with others, listening carefully to their opinions and encouraging them to develop. It follows, then, that real leaders are emotionally mature individuals with the courage of their own convictions and genuine concern for people.



Authenticity is important not only for peace of mind, but for the satisfactory fulfilment of a function. Without some symbol of its authenticity, we don't easily purchase a critical or expensive item — a bottle of wine to perfectly enhance a specially prepared meal, for example, or an original mechanical component to reliably enable the smooth running of a vehicle. People also rarely buy into leaders who are not authentic.

Authenticity is something easily spotted by seasoned professionals. It is a hard-won trait and a primary requirement for extraordinary leadership. Key characteristics of authentic leaders include an ability to conduct themselves as adults, be comfortable with themselves and others, and not play games. Above all, however, these people take care of themselves, the business and the team — in a balanced manner.

Personal and business coaching enables people to be accountable for their life choices; to understand and consider from various perspectives all the options open to them, know their impact and make the right choices — for themselves, the business and the team.

**START WITH THE COACH.** Coaches are crawling out of the woodwork to meet the increased demands of business. For the unseasoned, selecting a suitable service provider is a minefield. There are as many definitions of personal business coaches as there are approaches. Some have more substance than others. There are many points of entry to executive, personal and business coaching. At the lower end of the scale, coaches will offer clients a watered-down version of listening therapy and a single one-size-fits-all question/answer methodology, or they may simply be good counsellors.

Coaches of substance, on the other hand, use a number of methodologies and have significant experience and success in business and with people. They should be able to address brutal facts of the situation and, very importantly, be able to inspire the person they are coaching.

Any intervention where one person listens to another is powerful but solid, effective coaching is not just time- and attention-based. The art of coaching is in enabling the coachee to explore the problem, and put it in perspective. This requires emotional maturity and integrity on the part of

the coach, as well as a sense of the challenge the coachee is confronting.

A good coach will understand the right question to ask without also supplying the answer. Should they supply the answer, they step into the role of mentor, which is very different from coaching. Coaching questions may include: Why and how did the problem arise? What will happen if you don't change anything? What are your options? What are the potential impacts? What can you change? What is your role in this?

Many of the "problems" faced by executives are simply the result of not asking the right questions and thus not coming up with sufficient answers to produce a satisfactory choice.

If the coach also does not know the right questions to ask, either due to a lack of personal maturity or an inability to accurately understand and separate the intrapersonal and business challenges involved, then both end up chasing their tails in the intervention.

**FINDING SELF.** A typical coaching intervention may begin when a senior executive or HR manager approaches a personal coach to assist in the retention or "adjustment" of a valued staff member. Their requests run something along the lines of: "Joe doesn't fit, can't toe the line and is unable to manage Jane and John. Can you help us sort Joe out so we don't lose him?"

Almost without fail, Joe is found to be a remarkably talented and very driven individual. Joe's problem: a solid understanding, knowledge and belief in himself; and an inability to manage the situation effectively due to emotionally-led reactions to people.

People like Joe, regardless of how gifted or capable they are, often believe they have a problem because they create chaos and discomfort around themselves. While they can often see from their results that they are good at what they do, they are receiving conflicting messages. Typically, their reasoning is as follows: "I know I deliver what is required of me, but people are uneasy in my presence, thus I must be doing something wrong."

When a senior staff member or executive cannot deal with other staff or colleagues appropriately, subordinates end up having to "manage the manager". This potentially makes for a lot of dishonest communication as people are

then dealing with each other's ego, status and power issues, not with the business at hand. As a result:

- Execution and delivery suffer as executives don't know who to delegate to and don't let people "own" their jobs, preferring to tell them what to do.
- Communications suffer as everyone is focused on talking, not listening or giving feedback.
- There is no real sustainable growth for the company, the individual or the team as none are empowered and no lasting networks are created.

### *Coaching is the art of enabling people to think and make responsible choices*

Coaching puts the individual in an environment where they are being listened to in a considerate manner and can reclaim their power. There is no intent to change the person through the intervention, merely to free them to be themselves. With greater conviction in self, which includes acknowledging own achievements and abilities, they can self-regulate better, not constantly react to other people.

The first step to maturity and authenticity is understanding that our lives are defined by the choices that we make. That there are many choices and if we make one consciously we can fully participate in life.

Authentic, mature leaders remain genuine in their willingness to help others grow. The extraordinary leader has a multitude of skills, including the ability to approach different people in different ways and convey a message in the most appropriate way for that person at that time.

**EXTRAORDINARY LEADERSHIP.** A leader creates a vision, inspires and motivates other people, gets things done and is courageous. But even Hitler could lay claim to these attributes. Extraordinary leaders, however, have a genuine passion and belief in people, and take the time to listen to what others have to say.

It is critical in the South African environment to be open to dealing with people from different backgrounds. To do this, we have to be consistently authentic. We give something of ourselves in our belief in others. It requires courage and a willingness to make ourselves vulnerable.

In a nutshell, extraordinary leadership requires authentic effort. ■