Chapter 7
The Coaching Leadership Style (CLS)

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is both a concept and practice that involves several criteria including individual characteristics, communication skills, decision-making, and relationship with subordinates. There are a variety of leadership styles that exist today. Some of these styles concentrate on the hierarchy and power of the position, while yet others focus more on the relationship to followers to achieve results. One such leadership style is the coaching leadership style (CLS). This chapter provides an in-depth understanding of CLS including its origins, characteristics, necessary skills, and connections. Related and opposing leadership styles are also discussed for enhanced content of the approach. Both an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of applying a coaching leadership style, and how one learns to be an effective coaching leader is provided. Further discussion on effective situations and follower readiness for CLS is also given. This chapter concludes with a final look at four practicing coaching leaders and what we can learn from their examples.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of leadership has been investigated by researchers for over a century (Bass, 2009: Northouse, 2022). As a result, numerous studies have generated various leadership styles to distinguish one type of leader from another. These styles vary in focus from results-driven to employee-centered and feature a number of critical characteristics or behaviors for each different style.

Coaching as a concept, on the other hand, has existed a mere ten years longer than leadership. First developed in academia at Oxford University, the idea of coaching someone from where they are, to where they need to be, was conceptualized through tutorship. Assisting students to pass exams was the early goal of coaching in this environment (Nieuwerburgh, et al., 2018). Just a short twenty years later, coaching would start to be used in athletics in its most familiar form (Day & Carpenter, 2015). It would take almost a century for the fields of leadership studies, professional development, and psychology to embrace the concept even further.

Concurrently, leadership research evolved to examine factors outside of the leader itself, including relationships and the environment. Hersey and Blanchard were the first to identify a coaching component to their situational leadership theory. Within their model, there are four areas to the situational leader: directing, coaching, joining, and delegating (Hersey et al., 2001). This offered professionals a new concept to employ with their followers, which also aided the development of the mentorship and executive coaching realms.

Both concepts have continued to expand in depth and breadth of research, but in the last forty plus years their paths have finally crossed. Leadership coaching has developed into an extremely popular concept within executive ranks mainly due to executive coaching firms that perceived the need for the profession. These firms yielded to professional organizations who certify those who want to pursue professional coaching in various industries. One such organization is the International Coach Federation or ICF which was founded by Thomas Leonard in 1995. Currently, ICF is the world's largest organization of professionally trained coaches and actively promotes the profession (Brock, 2008, 2014; ICF, 2022).

Considering the history of both constructs, this then begs to ask the question, does one need to become a certified coach in order to practice leadership coaching? The answer is directly positioned between the two concepts, and the result is coaching leadership style or CLS. Sir John Whitmore has been credited with the development of CLS during the 1970s and in helping IBM executives be the first to learn and apply it (Correia, 2023). Nearly three decades later, Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee (2013) would connect coaching leadership style to emotional intelligence and its four domains which can drive and boost performance. enhancing additional interest in the style.

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