

Chapter 8

Harness a Leadership Superpower: How to Be a Coach-Like Communicator

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the importance of coach-like communication in daily interactions with others. It focuses on the differences between pure coaching experiences and how to utilize five skills—(1) inquiry, (2) acting experimentally, (3) evoking awareness, (4) optimizing performance, and (5) working across differences—in regular interactions with team members. Application of coach-like skills will look different depending on each situation, but taking the time to become a coach-like communicator contributes to greater self-awareness for team members, increases trust, and promotes team cohesion.

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Consider the worst conversation you have had with someone. Did you feel heard by the other person? Did you feel as though a mutual agreement (either towards a goal or a resolution to a problem) was achieved? At the end of the conversation, what emotion came to the surface for you? What were your feelings towards that person the next time you saw them? What about the 10th time you saw them?

Now, consider the best conversation(s) you have had with someone. Did the other person have an obvious goal they were pushing during the conversation? Did it feel like they truly listened to your responses to their questions? Did it seem like they showed engagement in other ways besides their verbal cues? Did they direct the conversation to what they wanted, or facilitate and ensure that it stayed on track based on the desired discussed outcome?

If we examine the differences between these two styles of communication, we can point to what makes one more impactful than the other. Coaching.

The concept of coaching is not new in leadership or leadership education. Many professionals are adept at educating others by using skills akin to coaching. Our focus of this chapter is utilizing coaching as a style for more engaging communication. The skills of being “coach-like” in conversations can facilitate greater self-awareness in others, foster open ended thinking, and cultivate trust. Think of where these skills could take you and members of your team! This leadership superpower does not require weeks of training to harness, but rather special attention paid to five identifiable skills that, when used in conjunction with other effective communication skills, can increase team cohesion and strengthen effectiveness of individual team members.

This chapter provides a high-level overview of “what” coaching is and examines what pure coaching looks like, identifies what communication is, reviews how and why to utilize coaching communication in daily interactions, includes instruction on the five coach-like skills for coaching conversations, showcases an example of what coach-like communication might look like, and addresses why some learners do not see the immediate value of being coach-like in their communication.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching is defined by the International Coaching Federation as “partnering with a client in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (International Coaching Federation, 2023). The key word here being partner. True coaching is often analogized as walking with the coachee down a path - the path is lit and designed by the coachee, but steps are guided by the coach. The coach asks inspiring questions that provide a space for exploration and awareness by the coachee. The path may wind in interesting ways as the client considers each (potentially difficult) question, but they end up at

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