

Guidelines for Distance Coaching

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Overview

Coaching without face to face contact is challenging. To successfully maintain the benefits discovered in Emerging Leaders program, I'll point out a few guidelines that help you sustain the power of one on one coaching when you continue the dialogue through email, telephone conferences, and web casts.

Voice

When we meet face to face, our memories encode the tone, inflexions, and pitch of those before us. More than any of our primary senses, voice memory helps us recall the state of mind, emotions, and relationship aspects we establish with our coaches. Use your voice on distance coaching calls to re-establish trust. Listen for the voice of others. Are they as certain now as they were during the training experience? Do you detect self-confidence? Is the passion still burning in the plans they articulated the last time you spoke face to face?

Data

Events change nearly as soon as we depart the doors of training programs. Personal, professional, and spiritual developments move on. To effectively coach others, we need updates on events to know the changing world others are experiencing, and shift our coaching dialogue to the new and relevant events of today. Sending emails, text, faxes 24 hours in advance of a distance coaching session is a proven means of informing each other of our changing experiences, and tying them to the past. Remember the STAR anagram- What are the changing Situations, Tasks, Actions, and Results? Provide your coaching partner with updates before engaging in distance coaching for maximum impact during the session.

Heartbeat

Setting a standard interval for coaching is essential in a busy world, where interruptions and unexpected events pressurize our worlds. A “heart beat” should be established that brings a sense of expectancy and routine to the coaching calls. Commit to a routine time when you can focus your time and energy fully. Spontaneity is as important as routine. Great coaching relationships have both routine commitments and in the moment qualities. After you build your standard coaching calendar, think about when a spontaneous call or email might be appreciated before an important event, or immediately afterwards. Sending a post card from wherever you are traveling gives your coach a visual sign of where you are, and your commitment to reconnect. Think about what your coach likes– a special tea, coffee, or photo of favorite sports interest keeps you emotionally in touch.

Quality of Coaching

Sustaining the quality of coaching while operating at a distance requires the same core elements as face to face: intensive questioning, positive affirmations of progress, and genuine listening for the meaning behind the words. Continue to use powerful questions. Ask yourself if you have the right balance of inquiry and advocacy. Ask yourself what is in the left hand column “unspoken” thoughts that are not being expressed. When we discipline ourselves to these high standards of exploring the experiences of others, we continue to tune into the daily challenges and successes. Particular attention should attend to the changes in plans and aspirations. As we move from face to face situations, you have almost no means of “seeing” the state of physical excitement, depression, or atrophy. Listen for the emotive state, and when in doubt, take a stab at the emotions you are hearing in the conversation.

Complexity

We all need road maps to understand where we are going, and how to get there. In distance coaching conversations the same apply. Provide visual aids, such as diagrams, charts, photos, and drawings to synthesize multiple relationships, dynamics, or concepts. The faster you can understand the complexities, the more effectively you can coach each other. In a world of scanners, web cams, and fax machines, few barriers stand in the way of visualizing each other’s worlds.

Process

From time to time, we all need to check the processes we apply to coaching. Establish a maintenance rule. Openly ask what needs repair, replacement, or servicing in your

distance coaching plan. Refresh your routines to stay in pace with changing pressures. Make communications around your process as fundamental as the content of your distant coaching discussions. And, don't forget to have fun- explore the whole life of your coaching partner. Within cultural norms, explore how they feel about the larger circle of life and what they are proudest of beyond the limits of their job life.