

Hit Your Peak Performance



by Dennis Heath

There is a cultural difference between attitudes to executive Coaching in the West and Asia. In the West if an executive is told he has been assigned a Coach he will be delighted and will eagerly look forward to his first session. He will view it as a sign that his employer values him highly and wants to invest in his personal success. In Asia the feeling is more one of, "What's wrong with me? I don't have any problems. Why have they got me counseling"? Thankfully this attitude is now changing.

There is much misunderstanding surrounding the nature and effectiveness of Coaching. I recently read an article expounding the 'dangers' of Coaching. When Coaching becomes confused with therapy, therein lies the danger. Coaching is very different to therapy and business Coaches are not usually trained psychologists, they don't need to be. A professional business Coach will recognize whether a client has an underlying psychological problem early on in preliminary discussions and will recommend expert help. A Coach can only work successfully with a normally functioning client.

Coaching has been popular in the USA for many years and has also gained ground in Europe as a means of improving human performance. It was born out of sports Coaching where it has long been acknowledged that anyone who has a modicum of talent and physical skills can be

trained to be proficient in a sport. However, being skilled in the tactics of the sport and having physical prowess is not enough to become a top athlete. Something else is needed to reach peak performance, to become world class.

Coaching is really about looking within, to discover the beliefs or attitudes that may be inhibiting someone from transcending 'best' performance to reach 'peak' performance. There are many examples of the power of good Coaching.

A British motorcycle racer who took part in World Championship races consistently found himself near the front of the field, sometimes even spending a few laps at the front, but would always end up crossing the finish line no better than seventh or eighth. In practice sessions he regularly outperformed the rest of the field and was a master of his craft. It took a Coach to help him discover what was putting the brakes on his performance. His belief was that he wasn't worthy of being at the front with the world's best riders. Once his belief was uncovered, with the help of the Coach, he was able to overcome this irrational belief and began appearing regularly on the winner's podium.

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Business Coaching has a similar purpose, to take the brakes off whatever might be holding back an executive from reaching peak

performance. As in sports situations, the Coach first takes his client on a journey of self-discovery to reveal areas that need to be worked on. The key issue might be behavioural, attitudinal, self-confidence, self-belief, difficulties with inter-personal relationships or a combination of factors inhibiting peak performance.

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The next stage is to explore solutions, and this is where Coaching differs from any other form of education or training. The subject, not the Coach, develops the solution. The skill of the Coach is in helping his client to develop a solution and action plan that will work for him or her. The Coach may prompt and facilitate but the final plan to remove the brakes will come from the client, not the Coach. He then works with his client over a period of time to ensure that the plan is worked, and adjusted if required, until peak performance is attained.

Coaching as an acceptable form of executive development is growing in Singapore. Senior managers recognize that training can only achieve so much. Managers can be skilled, knowledgeable and experienced and still not reach peak performance without professional help from a third party. So if your boss tells you that you've been assigned an executive Coach, go out, celebrate and boast about it to your friends. It could be the start of your rise to peak performance and greater recognition.