



# Coaching and Being Coachable

## Accelerate Your Learning to Improve Your Performance

In 1990 Peter Senge asked the business world, “Does your organization have a learning disability?” In many organizations, the answer is still, “Yes, despite much great work having been done.”<sup>1</sup>

This is due to the magnitude and depth of our challenge – and looking for solutions without a comprehensive understanding of what’s missing. Senge pointed to,

*“...identification with one’s role versus the purpose of the organization....the propensity to find someone or something outside of ourselves to blame when things go wrong.... reacting and overreacting to external enemies....focusing on event-explanations that distract us from seeing and understanding the longer term behavior patterns that inhibit creativity and threaten survival...management teams squelching disagreement to provide the appearance of harmony that inadvertently stifles deeper analysis and cross-functional problem solving.”*

These are deep seated issues that are not overcome easily or quickly. With all due respect to the Information Age, the proliferation of more knowledge and information has not broken down the strongest barriers to learning at the core of our disability.

**A surrender of our egos is what's called for. We need a deeper exploration into the heart of humanity to free ourselves from our tendencies toward self-sabotage.** Twenty-six years later, in the Foreword to *The Flourishing Enterprise*<sup>2</sup>, Senge queried into this deeper territory,

*“How do we tap passion, energy, imagination, perseverance, and willingness to truly grow as a human being, in ourselves and collectively? How do we recognize and cultivate people’s innate concern for matters beyond themselves? .... Practices that shift how we think and interact will help people both in getting things accomplished and in shifting the place from which we operate in our accomplishing.... It is only through practices that we can break down deep individual and collective habits...(regarding) our own awakening....”*

<sup>1</sup> *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter M. Senge, Doubleday, 1990

<sup>2</sup> *The Flourishing Enterprise: The New Spirit of Business*, Chris Laszlo and 8 Co-authors including Paul Werder, Stanford Business Books, 2014

These practices must open our hearts to one another. They need to dissolve our ego-triggered reactions that cause separation and inhibit learning. This is the work of those who want to transcend the ego-driven thought patterns that have us feeling powerless and worthless in one moment, and then feeling the need to be the smartest guy in the room in the next moment.

We call the two practices that make learning an everyday occurrence *The Practice of Being Coachable* and *The Practice of Providing Coaching*. These practices best occur with people you love working with. Ironically, if you practice effectively with anyone, you will soon love working with them.

Becoming truly coachable, your workdays become an ongoing workshop where you can learn from anyone and everything that happens. While doing so, you will consistently improve your performance. Ideally, these two practices become commonplace in your organization and everyone develops strong expertise at learning and bringing the best out of others.

**How is coaching different from supervision?** Supervision is a requirement of every job where you have an assigned boss who is accountable for your success. It is a hierarchical relationship that can become transactional, diminishing, or superficial. Coaching is a voluntary relationship, regardless of hierarchy, that can be enriching and even life-changing.

The role of the coach is to support your self-generated commitment to your own success and growth. Coaching requires a relationship of authenticity, vulnerability, and safety. It also requires a commitment to set aside your egos for the sake of your mutual success and growth. The best supervisory relationships become coaching relationships in both directions; these two roles can ideally co-exist when there's explicit clarity about which conversation you are having.

**Is coaching the same as therapy?** No, not at all. Coaching is about how well you perform at work and it places the focus squarely on your future. The best coaches challenge you to replace your counterproductive beliefs and behaviors with your highest intentions and empowering actions. They do not concern themselves with where your disempowering narratives and approaches came from. They help you shift out of your ego and into your heart where you have access to your inspiration, values, and character strength.

The best coaches are also very coachable themselves. It is a way of being that will most effectively support your highest levels of accomplishment and fulfillment.

### **The Practice of Being Coachable: Principles and Steps for the One Being Coached:**

1. I am comfortable with both my strengths and weaknesses; my genuine confidence allows me to be more than open to learning what is meaningful to myself and the people I work closely with.
2. When difficulties and challenges arise, I exude a sense of possibility and openness to a positive outcome.
3. I actively invite learning from all directions – customers – those I am accountable to – peers – those who are accountable to me.
4. I set aside my ego and my need to be “right” in the interest of strengthening my capabilities and getting the job done.

5. When others are coaching me ineffectively, I am able to find the intended jewel in spite of the rough delivery or request they alter their coaching to make it more palatable, as opposed to “close myself down” and become defensive.
6. I use the coaching to see things in a new way and to make personal improvements.
7. I openly acknowledge mistakes and what I’ve learned in a way that inspires the team and sets the tone for everyone else to become more coachable.
8. I bring this philosophy of learning to my entire organization by inviting and instigating changes to our usual ways of doing things so that my organization optimizes its contribution by bringing the best out of everyone.

### **The Practice of Coaching: Principles and Steps for the Coach:**

1. I ensure the fundamental prerequisites are in place:
  - An unusually strong relationship based on mutual respect
  - Something perceived to be of vast importance “at stake” for all parties
  - A complete surrender of the ego in favor of what can be learned and what needs to be accomplished
  - A total commitment to contribution by the coach, whose only intention is that the person being coached thrives
  - An awareness by everyone, especially the coach, that no one has a “lock” on the “truth”
2. I get certain that the person I am coaching has granted me “permission in the moment” as I choose to embark upon or continue this conversation.
3. I consistently and continuously maintain the person’s value and dignity while leading an inquiry into “what’s missing” – helping the person to find their own answers.
4. I clearly, directly and powerfully point out a person’s “blind spot” or ineffective behavior with tough questions and observations without it being viewed as a personal attack.
5. I stay with the person until a powerful commitment is made to put in place “what’s missing.”
6. I follow up with the person until what is at stake has been fully realized to its maximum potential.
7. I acknowledge the person fully regardless of the outcome to strengthen the relationship and expand the permission for coaching in the future.

As you begin to digest the depth and complexity of these two practices, you can likely also imagine a whole new world of work that is possible. Being collectively successful will be so much easier when we get our egos out of the way!

That’s the work of a learning organization. It’s the same work that’s been called for throughout the ages. It is the work calling you forward now. You begin with yourself. You can use our 5 minutes per day Leadership Mastery Practice to put one piece of your puzzle in place at a time (Chapter 13 in our Mastering Effectiveness Guide).

If you accelerate your growth every day, who knows where you’ll end up? But wherever that is, we promise you one thing for sure: you’ll be more content and satisfied with who you are and how you got there.