

Enneagram and Work Part 1: The Leader as Coach



Introduction

Powerful forces are redefining the nature of work and the working world at a rapid and intense pace. As a result, leaders need to step up and deliver on an ever-broadening mandate. The mandate for leaders is now as wide as it is deep, and there is no shortage of discussion regarding the most prevalent and urgent challenges that leaders face today.

We believe that one of the most significant challenges is the need for leaders to develop others; thus making the role of the leader as coach supremely important. Both the literature and practical research share the same findings; coaching enables leaders to impact performance in the most direct and meaningful way, as well as inspire greater agility, innovation, creativity, resilience and collaboration in others.

The thought of leaders as coaches in the organisational context might make intuitive sense to you, but you are likely still wondering what exactly does it mean? Good question! This two-part series of articles will explore this question in detail, and to help leaders find practical solutions for the demanding task of developing others. In the first article, we will look at why a leader's role as coach is one of the most significant applications of coaching in an organisational context. In the next article, we will explore how the Enneagram and Enneagram coaching practices can support leaders as they step up to this vital challenge.

The case for leaders as coaches

“He who thinks he is leading and has no one following him is only taking a walk.”

Malawian Proverb

There can be no leaders without followers. Indeed, great leaders know and understand that no matter what they set out to achieve, their success depends on the success of others. In essence, it is a symbiotic relationship where followers tasked with strategy execution, are dependent on their leaders to provide guidance. After all, leaders should ignite passion in their followers, bringing out the very best in them. It is also a leader's responsibility to remove obstacles, as well as build confidence in others and their capabilities to deliver on the goals before them.

There is resounding evidence that leaders who actively bolster their followers achieve higher levels of individual and organisational success. (Despite a lack of definitive answers to the questions around how to overcome the numerous leadership challenges.)

For evidence, you need to look no further than the Global Leadership Forecast 2018 ¹. It is particularly insightful in this regard, unpacking noteworthy findings of the state, context, and future of leadership across the globe. Although the reports' conclusions could fill an entire article, we've selected those with the most relevance to our discussion of the leader as a coach.

The number one concern of CEOs is talent.

Only 14% of respondents believe that they have the talent they need to execute business strategies. Ultimately, even the best strategy is rendered utterly useless if there are insufficient numbers of the 'right' people with the 'right' skills to actually implement it and bring the vision to life. *Leaders, therefore, need to develop the talent they have by actively working with their people to hone their skills and capabilities.*

Gender diversity improves profitability.

Organisations with women in leadership positions are 1.4 times more likely to have sustained profitable growth. Research shows that organisations with greater gender diversity report higher levels of collaboration, better quality leadership, greater agility, and a higher propensity for experimentation in pursuit of innovation. *Gender inequality remains rife within organisations. The onus is on leaders to level the playing field and develop those women they lead, and actively create opportunities for them to thrive and rise through the ranks.*

Leadership potential needs to be developed earlier.

Organisations that extend leadership development initiatives to those beyond the traditional target audience (senior level leaders) are 4.2 times more likely to outperform those that don't. Organisations need to take a broader view of what it means to have 'leadership potential' and how that impacts on its ability to remain competitive and sustain performance. It also needs to implement strategies that identify and develop potential leaders far earlier in their careers than is currently the norm. *Leaders, therefore, have to look across the organisation to identify others with leadership potential and actively work to help them develop their skills and capabilities. Both organisational and individual sustained performance relies on it.*

Senior leaders need a greater alignment.

Leadership is no longer about the solo efforts of a charismatic leader. It is being redefined as a ‘team sport’ reliant on senior leadership alignment and coherence around key focus areas like energy and development passion, future-focused leadership skills, and company culture. *The effectiveness and success of a coaching culture in general (and a ‘leader as coach’ culture specifically) is dependent on leaders adopting this approach and be fully and genuinely committed to the endeavour.*

‘Do-it-yourself’ leadership growth doesn’t suffice.

Organisations are defaulting to a leadership development approach centered on giving leaders access to resources and leaving them to use them (or not) as they see fit. What leaders report to truly want is personalised/individualised leadership development, and the opportunity to learn from both internal and external mentors and their fellow leaders. *Therefore, responsibility for growing more leaders and more broadly growing talent in the organisation cannot be deferred to books and online resources. It is the responsibility of other leaders to build and develop others; no other approach works as effectively!*

These insights are striking! Not least of all because there is a genuine sense that there has been a noticeable slip in leadership ‘bench strength’ across organisations, industries, and geographies. It means that there are fewer and fewer individuals who are ready at a moment’s notice to step into a possible leadership vacuum in an organisation. And of course, this is both undesirable and potentially dangerous for many organisations.

Ralph Nader famously said: “The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.” And yet research indicates that efforts to do just this are either faulty or non-existent. Aggravating and potentially worsening this situation is the impact of digital transformation and the threat of disruption. It has had a profound impact at every level of the organisation and influences leadership capabilities significantly. The message is loud and clear: leaders need to be focused on identifying and developing other digital-savvy leaders. It is thus unsurprising that Evan Sinhar, PhD., the Chief Scientist and Vice President of Development Dimensions International (DDI), observed that “...it’s become more important than ever that part of your job as a leader is to be a talent scout and a mentor who develops other leaders.”

Undoubtedly, leaders cannot execute their strategies alone and thus a significant aspect of leadership’s role is getting work done through others. Coaching, therefore, is a crucial link in strategy execution, bringing focus to critical elements of the operations and ensuring alignment, accountability, and engagement. The act of leading, therefore, requires others to follow, and meeting the challenges of leadership, consequently requires that those who follow must be given everything they need to be successful. It is quite clear that “everything they need” goes well beyond resources!

Allocating dedicated time and energy to work with and coach followers are fundamental to leadership success.

The problems that arise as a result of ineffective or non-existent coaching by leaders is poor morale, frustration, lost opportunities, wasted efforts and energy, lack of experimentation and learning; and rigidity. Of course, the opposite is also true. When leaders get coaching right, organisations see improvements across the board. Their people display everything from improved agility and resilience to creativity, innovation, increased appetite for experimentation and rapid development, and enhanced collaboration.

The makings of an effective coach

Interestingly, almost two-thirds of leaders regard themselves as being highly effective when it comes to coaching and developing others. Unfortunately, much of the data associated with these claims seem to suggest a different story. This might be due to the **multiple and genuine challenges around the idea of the leader as a coach**. These include:

- Role-switching difficulties and the blurring or blending of leader and coach responsibilities,
- Time pressures and deadlines creating difficulty in making time for coaching,
- Competing objectives of the organisation, the leader, the follower, and the coach; and
- The fact that established leader-follower relationships often carry bias and past baggage.

In the book ‘Primal Leader,’ Daniel Goleman (most famous for his contribution to the world of Emotional Intelligence) and his colleagues talk about the emotional resonance that distinguishes great leaders from the rest. Coaching others from a position of emotional resonance, underpinned by self-awareness (a cornerstone of emotional intelligence), enables leaders to unleash the potential in others in a compelling way.

Consider the following example which reflects what happens when a leader assumes the role of coach but lacks the self-awareness necessary to achieve emotional resonance. A busy executive, realising that to achieve organisational strategic imperatives, decides he needs to meet with and ‘coach’ his team. As a solution-oriented problem solver, he coaches to solve his team’s problems with absolutely no pause, or recognition of the personal struggles and issues they may be facing. Problem solved; box ticked? Well, maybe not. And the executive probably has no real sense of why, when the issue pops up at a later date, it is still an issue!

Leaders don’t automatically assume the characteristics of a good coach merely by taking on a leadership role. Becoming a good coach requires that leaders proactively develop their coaching skills and reframe for themselves what it means to add value to their people and organisation.

Becoming an effective coach requires that leaders address the vast array of challenges they face in taking on the role of coach as described above. Without probing the existing paradigms and insecurities that leaders hold, and harnessing greater self-understanding and self-awareness, these leaders will struggle to add value as coaches. And, of course, without

developing the necessary skills and confidence through training and development, performing the role of coach might well be beyond these leaders' reach.

On the other hand, when leaders are intent on developing the vast set of skills required to be an effective coach, and build on their understanding of themselves while reconciling the challenges they face in taking on the coaching role, they are much more likely to have a positive impact on those they lead, the organisation as a whole, and even themselves.

So, what exactly are the characteristics of leaders who have honed their skills and become effective coaches?

Leaders who coach impactfully...



Seek and guide development, not just set goals and tasks, monitor, and evaluate.



Help their people identify their unique strengths and weaknesses, helping them to see how these influence their aspirations.



Provide constructive, candid, and honest feedback.



Encourage the establishment of long-term, meaningful development goals.



Guide collaborative development of plans for attaining those goals, including the acknowledgement of the responsibility they have for their people's growth and development.



Foster confidence in others by helping them navigate the complexities of their working environment.



Engage in the moment (not only at scheduled points), frequently and informally chatting to their people.



Get to know their people on a deeper, more personal level to understand their motivations and help them more precisely to realise their aspirations.



Do not focus on just supporting their people to get their jobs done. They gently stretch them and push them to exceed their own personal expectations.

This is not an exhaustive list of the characteristics that a leader might possess when it comes to effective coaching. It does, however, seem to be commonly ascribed by leading academics, thinkers, and development practitioners.

In reviewing these characteristics, you might already realise the value of the Enneagram for leaders assuming the role of coach. The Enneagram helps leaders develop the self-awareness they need to be good coaches. It shows them the reasons for their behaviour and helps to uncover the core-motivations behind their thinking, feeling and actions. It equips leaders to turn sub-conscious assumptions into conscious ones and are therefore better equipped to coach in more integrated and healthy ways.

In conclusion

For leaders to be effective in their roles, they have to be committed to developing their followers. And to do this in a sustained and effective way, leaders must be equipped to coach their followers. Even this simplest of shifts in organisational practice of embracing a coaching culture, such as reframing performance management processes as coaching conversations, fundamentally demands that leaders show up as coaches in the organisation.

For every leader, the path to becoming the best coach they can be will be unique and their journey will look different.

Self-awareness - both your own and that of those you lead - will be a permanent aspect of whichever path you choose. It creates leaders who are authentic and able to coach and guide others in a way that is genuinely in their best interest. When this happens, coaching is likely to be well-received and deliver on expectations. The people being coached won't feel that they are being judged, manipulated, criticised, or attacked.

In our next article, we tap further into the wisdom of the Enneagram to help guide leaders along the journey and will focus on the honing of leaders' abilities to coach those they lead . It will also point out areas where leaders and teams with different Ennea core Types might experience challenges. It will also address areas for personal development required to become a more effective coach.

REFERENCES¹ <https://www.ddiworld.com/glf2018>