Effective Coaching

Tips for using the coaching experience effectively

You may have heard colleagues and friends talk about having a coach. You may have even responded, “That’s nice, I need one too!” never really knowing what having a coach can mean for your friend or for you. In this article I will attempt to explain what a coach is and does, how the coaching process works, the kinds of topics you might want to bring to coaching, dispel a few myths and finally how to best make use of your time investment.

What is a coach?

According to the International Coach Federation, Inc. (ICF) a coach is someone who “partners with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (ICF website, 2011). While people often relate coaching to sports, a more accurate metaphor for professional coaching would be that of a stage coach. Like the stage coach, professional coaching is a vehicle to help people move from a current position or reality to a destination of the client’s choosing (Pastoral Institute Coach Training, 2010). A coach is someone who has been trained to use a particular conversation model to support the client to reach this desired destination.

What makes a coach?

While many people call themselves coaches without having formal training, the coaches working with the Center for Teaching Churches have completed at least 60 hours of coach specific training. They are people who can provide you with a safe and confidential environment to bring challenges and questions for discussion and reflection. Coaching can be an effective way to build confidence in your innate ability as a leader and draw out gifts and talents you didn’t know existed within you. A coach is someone who wants the best for her/his clients and works within a code of ethics to support a client toward her/his personal and professional best.

How does coaching happen?

Coaching takes place within a conversation rubric built on questions, periods of silence and messages that help focus a client and create space for learning and growth. The coaching rubric can support a client to name a particular challenge, the possibilities to facing the challenge, choose the best possibility for that particular challenge, name potential problems with the possibility, and develop an action plan including dates of accomplishment. This conversation model supports a client to look forward and create a plan for getting to the desired destination.

John Dewey (Kadlec, 2007) believed that learning happens as a result of reflecting on the consequences of our experiences, not in the experiences themselves. Building on this understanding, coaching is a cyclical model of reflection and practice that allows the client to act, reflect, and then act again, developing opportunities to build creativity and responsibility in the process. As a result of a successful coaching process a client will find he/she is making shifts in thought and behavior. These small shifts are part of an evolutionary leadership development process that is both visible and sustainable over time.

Dispelling myths about coaching

Often people associate coaching with those who are struggling with difficulty and failure. This is actually not the most effective use of coaching. Coaching began in the corporate sector as a way of rewarding high performance and developing high performing leaders for even more responsibility and leadership. It is no secret that when people work from strength they can move faster and with more agility than
When they attempt to develop from weakness. Naming challenge and opportunity within areas of strong performance seems not to be the natural starting point and requires a shift in perspective and mindset. Once forward momentum has developed, strengthening weaknesses can take place while expending less energy.

Because many of us have been educated in a system that uses the banking method of learning, we come to the "student desk" waiting for someone to give us the answers. Often people think they have hired a coach to give them the answers and when this is not the case clients can become very agitated. A coach believes that his/her clients have the answers within them. The coaching expertise is one of listening and asking questions. The Center for Teaching Churches uses a hybrid approach to coaching referred to as the Coaching Mentor. This means that the coaches working in this project are not just trained coaches but have had successful ministries often aligned with the ministry areas of their clients. In this model the coaching mentor may also name possibilities but ultimately the process and next steps are built around the choice of the client.

Often clients think that because the coaching is connected to their work they should only talk about work related issues. Like ministry, coaching addresses a client as a whole person which makes issues such as work/life balance, hobbies, and self-care important to the coaching conversation. It is impossible to draw water from a dry well, thus ministers must spend time balancing their spirituality and sacred spaces with those of others. It is common practice for coaches who work with ministers to do theological reflection and support their clients to enliven the gospel work from within.

**Making the most effective use of your coaching time investment**

Coaching is an intentional practice which means that we need to think about how to make the best and most effective use of the time spent in coaching. Following you will find tips for making the best use of your time spent coaching.

**Clients who make the most effective use of the coaching hour are clients who want to be in the conversation.** I know this may surprise you but ministers can be resistant to reflection. It is a discipline to stop and reflect when so many tasks and people are asking for time. Stephen Covey in his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) writes that most of us spend our time working on issues that fall into a category of urgent and important. This certainly makes sense but he also encourages us to move more into the category of important and not urgent where we can be creative and thoughtful and focus on the issues that will give us the greatest impact. Make the most of your coaching time and forego the resistance to taking an hour for reflection by bringing your whole self to the conversation.

**Clients who make the most effective use of the coaching hour protect the coaching time slot and prepare for the conversation.** In the way that works best for your calendar, remind yourself of the coaching appointment the day before. Take a few minutes to reflect on questions like the following: Since your last coaching appointment, what wins have you experienced? What challenges have come your way? How do these relate to the overarching goals you’ve established? Of these things, what do you want to bring to the coaching conversation? Bring this information to the coaching conversation and if you left the previous appointment with next steps, come ready to discuss the outcomes with your coach. Coaches have expertise in making connections and braiding together strands of seemingly unrelated issues that when held together can change your life. You’ll be surprised what can happen when you come to the conversation ready to talk.

 Ministers often have an open door policy that connects closely to their philosophy and theology of ministry. It is also important to develop a philosophy and theology of study and reflection which requires an understanding on the part of those around you. It may be as simple or complex as letting
people know what it means when the office door is closed. The most effective coaching takes place in an uninterrupted time and place.

**Clients who make the most effective use of the coaching hour know they have things to learn and they enjoy the discovery process.** Allow yourself to be curious about your ministry setting and how you impact that setting. Be ready to learn things about yourself and the way you engage others that you will want to build on and/or adapt. Take on a spirit of experimentation with responsibility that will allow you to try new things within integrity lined boundaries. This kind of nimble and flexible growth place nurtures powerful, humble, and creative leaders.

**Clients who make the most effective use of the coaching hour develop relationships of trust.** Trust is key in any growing relationship and because building trust is a coaching core competency your coach will do everything she/he can to enter a trusting relationship with you. Think about how you build trust and if possible, share this with your coach as it will help to support the development of the coaching relationship.

Identify the people in your ministry setting who are trusted people and get feedback on your performance in the setting. Share this kind of feedback with your coach as it can lead to great learning and development.

Coaching is a powerful development tool that takes commitment from both individuals. Commitment requires open and honest communication. Be honest with your coach about what you are getting from the process. If the process isn’t meeting your expectations then that is an important truth to share with your coach.

Coaching is an intentional process of growth and support that can help you develop yourself as a leader. Invest in yourself.

References


Effective Coaching Action Guide

Summary:

Professional coaching involves a relationship with a trained coach and client where the client desires to grow and develop both personally and professionally. This module provides definitions of a coach and the coaching experience, clarifies typical misconceptions, focuses on the elements that contribute to effective coaching experiences, and identifies the value of making this investment of time and effort.

Focus:

This module provides the committee members with the opportunity to know more about the separate coaching experience and relationship that the new minister will have. Secondly, the essay serves as an opportunity for the committee and the new minister to share what they each bring to this experience, the importance of confidentiality, and their outcome expectations.

Introducing the Module: (Approximately 10 Minutes)

- Inform the group that the next meeting will include giving attention to the subject of Effective Coaching.
- Provide a copy of the essay for each member of the Minister Support Committee and the new minister.
- Share the Summary Statement and the Focus (listed above) with the group.
- The following assignments should be stated and a handout copy given to the group members:

Assignment for the Minister Support Committee members. As you prepare for the next meeting when the committee gathers to discuss this topic with the new minister, be prepared to give your responses to the following statements and questions:

1. Name 2-3 strengths you have discovered that you have.
2. In what ways can you use these in this support committee process?
3. Name 2-3 of your values. (For example, what is important to you in life, work and relationships?)
4. What does confidentiality mean to you?
5. Identify one or two intended outcomes you want to see as a result of this support committee experience with the new minister.

Assignment for the New Minister. As you prepare for the next meeting with your support committee be prepared to give your responses to the following statements and questions:

1. Name 2-3 strengths you have discovered that you have.
2. In what ways can you use these in this support committee process?
3. Name 2-3 of your values. (For example, what is important to you in life, work and relationships?)
4. What does confidentiality mean to you?
5. Identify one or two intended outcomes you want to see as a result of your experience with this support committee.
Engaging the Module: (Approximately 40 Minutes)

Phase 1
Begin the time together with having each committee member and the new minister to share the strengths that they have, and how they expect that they can offer these and use them in this process. You can use the following questions and statements to guide this phase of the discussion:
1. What are 2-3 strengths you have?
2. After you identify these strengths, share with us how you see that you can use these in our meetings and experience together

Phase 2
Confidentiality is identified as an important aspect of the coaching experience. Confidentiality will be an important and necessary quality for the support committee and the new minister. Take this time to have a discussion about confidentiality and how the group will adhere to this important quality using the following questions:
1. What does confidentiality mean to you? Invite each of the individuals to share their views on confidentiality.
2. What are your expectations for how we define confidentiality with this group?
3. How shall we define confidentiality for our group?
4. How will we handle a breach in confidentiality?

Phase 3
Having the opportunity to share individual expectations and intended outcomes for this experience can work to build a good foundation for understanding among the group, and help to provide some early clarification of goals for this group and how it can function effectively. After giving an opportunity for individuals to share these and listen to one another, identify common themes, and find agreement among the group with a few desired outcomes. Then lead the group to consider what it will require of each individual and of the group as a whole for these outcomes to be reached. Use the following as a guide for this discussion:
1. You were asked to identify one or two intended outcomes you want to see as a result of our experience together. What intended outcomes did you identify?
2. Are there common directions among the outcomes identified?
3. What 2-4 outcomes might we agree on at this point in our process that are of value to us in this experience?
4. What is required of us in order to work toward these?

Additional Comments:

The article states: “Clients who make the most effective use of the coaching hour protect the coaching time slot and prepare for the conversation . . . . You’ll be surprised what can happen when you come to the conversation ready to talk.” Encourage the group to make application of this principle to their participation in this support committee experience.
Member Support Committee Assignment

As you prepare for the next meeting when the committee gathers to discuss this topic with the new minister, be prepared to give your responses to the following statements and questions:

1. Name 2-3 strengths you have discovered that you have.

2. In what ways can you use these in this support committee process?

3. Name 2-3 of your values. (For example, what is important to you in life, work and relationships?)

4. What does confidentiality mean to you?

5. Identify one or two intended outcomes you want to see as a result of this support committee experience with the new minister.
New Minister Assignment

As you prepare for the next meeting with your support committee be prepared to give your responses to the following statements and questions:

1. Name 2-3 strengths you have discovered that you have.

2. In what ways can you use these in this support committee process?

3. Name 2-3 of your values. (For example, what is important to you in life, work and relationships?)

4. What does confidentiality mean to you?

5. Identify one or two intended outcomes you want to see as a result of your experience with this support committee.