



CHAPTER TEN

BECOMING A COACH FOR THE TEAMS YOU LEAD

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One of the core competencies of contemporary leadership is coaching. It is a field of management practice that is receiving renewed interest for the power it has to create and sustain *high performance*.

Although there are technical components to coaching, it is much more than technique. This article explores what is really required to make the transformation to *becoming* a coach—at all levels of human interaction. It's called “Transformational Coaching,” and is further described in *The Heart of Coaching* (Crane, 1998).

In traditional Western organizations, most managers have been conditioned to adopt a hierarchical command-and-control mentality. Moving from this traditional mind-set into Transformational Coaching requires us to do more than learn a few new management techniques. It requires us to *change the way we think*. It requires us to discover *what* we think—about our roles and the outcomes we attempt to achieve with people—and to transform both our thinking and our behavior.

Why is it necessary to change at such a deep level? Shouldn't business stay out of the personal arena? Why can't you just learn some new methods and techniques and begin coaching?

The fact is that personal aspects of our lives do not stay out of the business arena. Everyone brings to work the entire array of his or her personality—thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, habits, needs, wants, fears, desires, roles, and conditioning. Transformational Coaching does not *bring* the personal into work situations. It simply acknowledges that the personal element is a part of work and provides a framework—the heart of the coach—for dealing effectively with the whole human being.

Becoming a Boss

Be honest. If you have had authority over others, haven't you found it compelling? At times, didn't you feel powerful and strong? It's easy to see how even well-intentioned managers can enjoy the power trip of being the boss. Most of us possess at least some of the human beliefs that make us prey to this mentality:

- Our egos become invested in the roles we play and in the trappings of our authority;
- We believe that, because we have paid our dues, it is fair to expect others to do the same;
- We fear change and letting go of control;
- We fear failing in the eyes of the world; and
- We develop habits of behaving and thinking that reinforce the correctness of the boss approach.

Add to this list the fact that most of our role models at work are bosses, and that the human system of which we are a part does not accept changes to long-established roles easily, and there you have it: a boss in the making.

Beliefs and the Results Cycle

The “Results Cycle” describes the inevitability of this mind-set. The key to stopping the cycle is in understanding it. Let's begin with beliefs.

Our beliefs have a great influence over how we interact with people. What we believe tends to determine how we behave toward others. Our behavior tends to influence the quality of the relationships we have with others, which affects *their* behavior. This, of course, influences the results we obtain with these people. In turn, the results usually reinforce our belief in the correctness of our beliefs.

For example, if you believe that it is inappropriate to share your feelings with your co-workers, you might be formal and rigid with them to keep distance between them and your feelings. If this behavior is experienced by your co-workers as aloofness or coldness, they may feel put off and intimidated and begin drawing their own (potentially negative) conclusions about your feelings. Because they do not feel comfortable communicating with you, they may do work based on inaccurate interpretations of your instructions, rather than checking back to make sure that they understood. When you see the results, you may say to yourself, “See! If I can’t trust them to get the most fundamental instructions right, how can I trust them with personal information? You just can’t bring personal feelings into the workplace.”

Another example: If you believe that a manager is supposed to be strict and unbending with the rules, you may be tough and punish those who break the rules. In turn, your direct reports may become guarded and stop taking risks. As a result, your department may do all right, but turnover may be high and, unlike other departments, it will not win awards from top management for innovative and creative solutions to business problems. In frustration, you may hold even more tightly to your belief in the need for control and adherence to the rules. This cycle is self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating.

On the other hand, if you believe that collaboration between people leads to better results, you might be open with your thoughts and encourage others to be open in sharing their needs and ideas for solutions. Relationships become more open and trusting; the people you lead are more willing to take risks with presenting ideas; and you obtain better results.

The easiest place to break the power of the Results Cycle is in changing the beliefs. So which beliefs support bossing and which ones support coaching? Here’s a list:

- Bosses believe that their job is to push people or drive them; coaches believe that they are there to lift and support people.
- Bosses believe that they should talk at people by telling, directing, and lecturing; coaches believe in engaging in dialogue with people by asking, requesting, and listening.
- Bosses believe in controlling others through the decisions they make; coaches believe in facilitating others to make decisions and empowering them to implement their own decisions.
- Bosses believe they know the answers; coaches believe they must seek the answers.
- A boss triggers insecurity through administering a healthy dose of fear as an effective way to achieve compliance; a coach believes in using purpose to inspire commitment and stimulate creativity.
- Bosses believe that their job is to point out errors; coaches believe that their job is to celebrate learning.
- A boss believes in solving problems and making decisions; a coach believes in facilitating others to solve problems and make decisions.
- A boss believes in delegating responsibility; a coach believes in modeling accountability.
- Bosses believe in creating structure and procedures for people to follow; coaches believe in creating a vision and promoting flexibility through values as guidelines for behavior.
- A boss believes in doing things right; a coach believes in doing the right things.
- Bosses believe that their power lies in their knowledge; coaches believe that their power lies in their vulnerability.
- A boss believes in focusing on the bottom line; a coach believes in focusing on the process that creates the bottom-line result.

The Challenge of Change

If we did not get something out of the roles we play, change would be easy. Traditional working roles and relationships do offer a lot that is appealing. Let's take a look at the payoffs—and the penalties—for not changing.

Payoffs and Penalties for Bosses and Subordinates

Remaining a boss has its advantages. For example, bosses feel that they are in control; are “right” a lot (at least in terms their egos understand); maintain power, position, and authority, and therefore fit in with the establishment; make efficient short-term use of their time; maintain old habits; and keep all their current thinking or beliefs.

But they pay for keeping their positions as bosses (rather than transcending the role to become coaches). The costs include: losing the optimal contribution of other people’s creativity; missing others’ ideas, options, and alternatives; maintaining ownership of problems; and not learning from and about others. Bosses are more likely to create resentment with employees. Furthermore, there is always the risk that they will have the *wrong* answer and create more resentment when they cannot admit it.

There are prices and payoffs for being subordinate to a boss, too. On the plus side, subordinates have it easy—they usually wait for the boss to make decisions. They do not have to think or assume responsibility; they do not have to be afraid of making waves; they are safer politically; and they can get out of many difficult situations simply by saying, “It’s not my job.” Subordinates are likely to be able to retire on the job.

On the flip side, subordinates must often put up with not being allowed to think; not feeling valued or trusted; and feeling discounted and diminished. They often have to deal with their resentment toward their bosses, and they usually can’t expect much in the way of growth and development on the job. Their self-esteem can suffer.

Payoffs and Penalties for Coaches and Coachees

Changing to a coach-coachee relationship is not necessarily a bed of roses, however. It, too, carries compelling prices and payoffs. For example, coaches learn more about others and themselves, witness the development of other people’s capacities, and build better teams. They also benefit from improved working relationships, overall performance, and watching themselves grow and improve as coaches.

But, they often find that the risks are higher (both personally and politically). They must learn to trust others more. Transformational Coaching

takes more time and more personal courage than bossing. Coaches must share accountability. Coaches must become comfortable with confrontation of performance issues, and they must let go of their illusions of control.

Coachees also discover a set of positives and negatives when they make the transition. Although they have the opportunity for more growth and development, being a coachee means that more is required. Their working relationships improve, but they have more responsibility and accountability. There is usually a new pride of accomplishment, but it is uncomfortable becoming used to new ways. They feel valued, but find that the new paradigm requires that they risk more. Work is more fulfilling, but they have to change. They are performing at higher levels than before, but it is not always easy to hear their coach's feedback; sometimes they take it personally by interpreting the suggestions as if they were personal criticisms.

If you look closely, you will notice some trends here. Most of the payoffs for the boss and subordinate are short-term. The traditional boss/subordinate roles allow people to remain in their personal comfort zones. The prices paid, however, are long-term and weaken the overall capability of the individual, the team, and the organization. This transformation is not easy. Each of us tends to be governed by our belief system about how things "ought to be." These beliefs filter our incoming experience, causing us to ignore what lies outside our own system.

Beliefs that Block Transformational Coaching

It can be extremely helpful to acknowledge your own personal barriers. Do you see yourself in any of the statements below?

- "I don't know how to coach. I don't want to coach. I don't consider myself coaching material."
- "Coaching is not valued around here. There are no coaching role models here. I'll look different if I'm the only one doing it. I won't be supported."
- "The benefits are unclear to me. Look at me—I didn't have coaching and *I'm* successful. I'm doing okay; I don't need feedback."
- "It's not my job. Somebody else will do it."

- “It takes too long to learn to coach and then to do it. My immediate needs are greater than their developmental needs. Other things are more important. I’ll do it later.”
- “It is inconvenient. It’s difficult. It’s time-consuming. It’s unnecessary.”
- “Change is scary. I’m afraid to ask how. I’ll lose control. I’ll make mistakes.”
- “I had a bad personal experience with coaching. It doesn’t really work.”
- “I don’t trust others to coach me. I do not want to confront others.”
- “I can’t change. I don’t want to change.”
- “It won’t make a difference. People won’t change with coaching. People won’t keep their agreements. People don’t want to be coached. People are really lazy and won’t respond. My people already know what I think about them.”
- “It’s just another management fad. Coaching is just a fancy word for ‘bossing’ people around.”
- “Real work is more important.”

Looking at the above list, which beliefs can you identify as your own? Are any close to your own beliefs? Are there other beliefs you may hold about coaching? If you are committed to becoming a coach, these beliefs need not be anchors around your neck. Suspend them for a moment while we look at a belief system that may support your changing your personal Results Cycle as a Transformational Coach.

Empowering Beliefs of a Coach

Just as bosses have underlying belief systems that support their Results Cycles, coaches have beliefs that support theirs. Let’s explore their thinking.

- As a supervisor, manager, or leader, I am responsible for my own and others’ work performance. I want to be successful in my role. I realize that all of the important work of this enterprise is done by and through people. I cannot succeed unless my teammates—above me, below me, and beside me—are also successful.
- I appreciate that I do not have all the answers. Others will become more effective if they are permitted to discover answers for themselves.

However, I have experience, wisdom, insights, and good ideas to pass along.

- I may be able to help others achieve their goals even more effectively if I share what I know and what I see. I can use coaching as the process of empowering and inspiring others to higher levels of performance.
- Therefore, I choose to be a Transformational Coach.

This leads us to a Transformational Coach's credo, which rests on the following beliefs:

- People are inherently good and they want to contribute.
- People are doing the best they can with what they know and are aware of at any given moment.
- People make mistakes, but most do not set out to make mistakes on purpose.
- Mistakes can be framed positively as learning opportunities for everybody on the team.
- Most people's limiting beliefs about their capacities and capabilities keep them from accomplishing more than they do.
- Because most work is done by, through, and with the cooperation of people, transforming their individual effectiveness will transform the performance of the team.
- People support the changes and commitments they create, not the ones forced on them.
- Unnecessary control is resented; people prefer to be "led" rather than "managed."
- Outside input from anybody is most helpful when it is really desired.
- Coaches can build strong, trusting relationships by being open and honest in owning and disclosing their thoughts and feelings.
- People's feelings must not be ignored; a holistic view of people allows one to see the whole person.
- People appreciate clear, honest feedback delivered in a straightforward manner.
- People really do want to improve.

All these beliefs can be summed up in a Transformational Coach's version of the "golden rule": a coach has *positive regard* for others. This is the attitude that typifies Transformational Coaching. The challenge is to suspend beliefs that block us from becoming coaches. When we consciously explore and replace our limiting belief systems, our energy, tone, and intention shift. It is a journey well worth the effort!

About the Contributor

Thomas G. Crane is a consultant, facilitator, author, and coach who specializes in assisting leaders in creating high-performance teams. He works with all levels of leaders and their teams to enhance their individual and team effectiveness in achieving performance objectives.

Tom's passion is also the title of his first book, *The Heart of Coaching*, which focuses on changing a leader's mind-set from "the boss" to the mind-set of "the coach." The premise of the book is that a performance-based, feedback-rich culture will more effectively support an organization's business strategy and lead to higher and more sustainable levels of performance.

Tom has worked as a consultant and engagement leader for the last fifteen years in small and large organizations going through strategic change and culture alignment. Some of the organizations with whom he has worked include AES Corporation, AEP Corporation, Anadarko Petroleum, A.T. Kearney, Baker & Botts, Bell Atlantic, CBS, Continental Airlines, Crowne Plaza Redondo Beach, Dixieline, Duty Free International, Dynege Corporation, ENRON Corporation, Equiva Services, Florida Power & Light, GPU Nuclear, Helen Woodward Animal Center, Hilton Grand Vacations, Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza, Home Savings of America, Host Travel Division-Marriott, KFC, Micron Electronics, KPMG Peat Marwick, Los Alamos Laboratory, New York Life, NYNEX, Qualcomm, San Diego State University, Shell Oil Company, Southern California Gas, Sonat, Inc., Teledyne Ryan Aeronautical, Times Mirror, Transco Energy, United Airlines, Vastar Resources, Von's Grocery Company, and Westrend Electric, Inc.

Prior to founding Crane Consulting in 1995, Tom was vice president of Senn-Delaney Leadership and consulted with clients engaged in strategic culture change. Additionally, he worked in financial planning and project management roles with Solar Turbines, a division of Caterpillar. He has a bachelor's degree from Purdue University and an MBA from Drake University.

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