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We look forward for more such contributions from you in our forthcoming issues of TMTC Journal of Management.

Warm regards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chetan Tolia', with a large flourish above it.

Chetan Tolia
Director – TMTC

My Transformational Journey into a Coach

Ram Ramanathan

Executive Coach



Abstract

The author describes his personal experience that converted him into a coach. The article brings out the effectiveness of managing by coaching in the modern corporations.

From There to Here

A corporation called to discuss whether I would take one of their managers as a coaching client.

The Human Resources Development team described the candidate as a young, high-performer who had created loyal teams. While being protective of his teammates, he was abrasive with peers. The organization rated him highly and didn't want to lose him, but was concerned he didn't fit in with the people-oriented culture of the organization.

This is a story I hear all too often.

The top of the pyramid does not want to accommodate rough edges. As Daniel Goldman observed, higher up the pyramid, greater the emotional intelligence needed. However, to 'roughshod over' others is part of the journey of a fast-forward manager in most corporations. This dilemma seems to be lost on management trainers.

"Gee!" I exclaimed, "that sounds just like me in my youth!" Fortunately, the two women I was talking to laughed and understood where I came from.

I grew up in a management culture that was highly macho. When bosses asked subordinates to jump, the guy determined to go places never

asked why, but asked, "Sir, how high?" Military management, applied to corporate environment without any of the military ethos, produced bizarre results.

Sun-Tzu¹, not Tao², was the manual.

Unfortunately for me, I was an exception and a maverick. I learned my own way by trial and lots of errors. I was never easy to mentor, since the mentor's experience was not my own to adopt and practice. Instead of conforming to autocracy, I rebelled.

Years later, out of the corporate system and after I discovered coaching, I asked a former senior HR colleague, "Why couldn't you guys think of coaching as an aid to management development, instead of all the expensive training programs you sent us to. It would have done me wonders. What I needed was to discover myself in my relationship with the organization."

Had I been coached in my thirties, as I coach young managers now, I would have probably not left this organization, which was my alma mater and still a home for me, in frustrated misalignment of values and expectations.

In the job I moved next as a Chief Executive, the owner Chairman of the family company was a born coach. He had no fancy educational

¹ Art of war, Sun-Tzu

² Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu

qualifications. He gave me a long rope, questioned me from time to time and left me to ponder and discover for myself whether what I was doing was right. He challenged me, but never lectured me or forced his solutions upon me. After all, he paid me to do my job.

I turned around two of his loss-making problem companies into stars. I remember him every day as I coach.

From an emotionally immature and rebellious manager in my thirties, I gradually grew into a caring patriarch as I turned around and built large companies in my forties, finally transforming into the coach that I'm today with a passion to help unleash potential.

This self-transformation, perhaps as a result of some past karma, happened naturally, though slowly. My intellectual arrogance could have turned into vicious autocracy, as it had in several cases I have been witness to. But the transformation could have also been hastened with the right intervention.

A good coach, as an intelligent mirror, could have transformed me faster, adding value to the organization and me. That I helped build a billion dollar group and advised Governments later in my career was despite my mentored management training and my early bosses.

Why is then coaching not an integral part of the learning and development of young managers?

Why is Coaching Important?

Even HR professionals would be surprised to know that the term 'Human Resources Development' was first coined by Indians, Dr. T.V. Rao and the late Dr. Udai Pareek of IIM Ahmedabad.³

Most managers think HRD means Human Resources Department and not Development. The essence of what Rao, Pareek and their collegial contemporaries strived for in HRD is what

UNESCO celebrates now as Lifelong Learning.⁴

Coaching is about learning. Mentoring is about teaching. Managing is about telling others what to do and driving them with carrots and/or sticks depending upon one's style. Corporations abound with many who wield big sticks. Autocratic managers on their way up seem to need yes men, not ones who think for themselves.

Coaching is learning about one's self. It's all about self-awareness. It's about unlocking one's own potential. Coaching enhances one's performance to meet one's unexplored potential, in one's own terms. It's a journey of self-discovery.

With a good coach, it's a joyful journey without destination, in line with what J. Krishnamurthy calls truth to be a pathless land.⁵

There are varied theories of management - X, Y, Z and a host of others. Managers pay lip service to these theories. Many who say that they follow theory Y do exactly the opposite. Managerial ego, especially when successful, does not allow us to recognize others' potential. We are the best, and we are here to show you how; and you better listen.

The more insecure a manager is, the more subordinates one eats for breakfast, to display one's power and control.

Pause now and think about your own career. How many people have really contributed to your growth as an individual in your organization? How many can you count?

Some may have helped you along in your promotions. Some, you may have adopted as godfathers. But how many truly challenged your basic beliefs, without imposing their own values upon you, made you ponder and helped you grow in self awareness? How many were coaches to you?

In my life, I can barely recollect two or three such amongst a host of senior colleagues. Why couldn't every one I worked with have been a coach?

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T._V._Rao

⁴ <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/pdf/uiestud36.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/1929-truth-is-a-pathless-land>

Do You Have What it Takes to be a Coach?

Is every senior manager automatically a good coach? Do managers need training to coach, even if they have been in HR functions?

What do you think?

It's fashionable these days for every retired senior manager to call oneself a coach, just the same way everyone without a job calls oneself a consultant. I did that too, when the South East Asian economic crisis left me without a job, when I was barely 50 after having helped build a billion dollar enterprise in the nineties.

Coaches and consultants do not need to legally undergo any training or earn a credential to practice. Clients seek them out by reputation and stay with them depending upon performance. If things go wrong, clients lose out big time.

In the case of consulting at least, since it is all about transferring material and tangible skills and knowledge, the managerial experience of having done similar jobs would be relevant, as in the case of mentoring. Experience and success in experience can be measurable indicators of quality.

Coaching, however, is vastly different. Coaching is about qualitative intangibles. A Coach works on behavioral and mental patterns. A Coach does not transfer from one silo of his knowledge to another silo of a client's vacant mind plot. Years of managerial experience and even success do not indicate, let alone guarantee, coaching ability. The few coaches who helped my career did not rise to the top of the pyramid.

Coaching is not transactional. It's transformational.

When I was deciding between options and at cross-roads a few years ago, some good friends suggested that I coach. Many of my colleagues from past careers were practising coaches. I had similar experience, perhaps more cross-cultural,

more global and more diverse. Ergo, I would be a good coach.

My wise wife stopped me short with just one question. 'You are not even a good listener. How are you going to coach?'

My wife had never worked nor learnt management, thank God. She didn't have to. She is a natural coach. She listens, she is focused and she is intuitive. How many managers are all these?

I stepped back. It wasn't that I always talked. I had attended Vipassana⁶ courses, where for 10 long days I never opened my mouth except to eat and drink. I also meditated. But then, I did talk more than listen.

I decided to do some research on coaching before hanging out a shingle. All that I learnt confirmed what my wife told me. I searched for a suitable program to train me in the coaching process. I finally found one outside India. I had also decided that I needed an international peer-judged credential as a measure of my learning. I have not regretted the dollars I paid for the program⁷ and the credential.⁸

The program changed my behavior. I was already convinced that I needed to be a good listener and I should focus on the client. As a meditator I was trained in both, but this did not always work when it came to interaction with peers and professionals. In the training program, I came across people from across the world, from a post-teen student to a Professor, and from an over-worked Serbo-Croatian housewife to a high-flying African American C Suitor. I was humbled by the wisdom of others as I learned to listen.

Once the awareness was established, the journey became smoother.

Changing Corporate Image

Perhaps some of you have watched Michel Moore's *The Corporation*.⁹ Like his *Fahrenheit*

⁶ <http://www.dhamma.org/>

⁷ <http://www.icoachacademy.com/>

⁸ <http://www.coachfederation.org/>

9/11, this too exaggerates to prove a point. Moore predicted in an elliptical way the crisis of confidence the world faces today with bankers and businesses.

Moore says that all corporate honchos are psychopaths. With real life corporate examples, Moore illustrates managerial behavior that WHO considers being psychopathic.

Moore may have gone overboard on this. The corporate world is only a microcosm of the larger macrocosm of humanity. But then, shouldn't people who have studied more, experienced more and earned more, have a more caring attitude to others than what we see in the corporate world today?

Why are corporations being termed as unethical today? Even if there are only a few Enrons and Tycos, a few Maddoffs and Rajaratnams, why is it the general perception that the corporate world is evil? Why do people feel that managers as a profession are bad, a connotation that was usually reserved for lawyers in earlier times.

I feel that managers as a class have lost touch with humanity and humility. They have become self-centered and obsessed with power and wealth. Their greed has overcome whatever idealism they started with. However much many of us managers may protest, we all know that these accusations are partly true and much of the blame is ours.

How can we move from self-centeredness to self-awareness? How can we move from greed to contribution?

Managing by Coaching: Indian Style

To change the corporate image, one needs to change the corporation. To change the corporation, we need to change its leaders and managers. To change them, their mindsets need to be changed.

This is possible.

Unlike transactions, which are linear and time-based, transformation is instantaneous and holistic. One doesn't get enlightened in phases, but in a flash. It's the awareness that lights one up and transforms.

I observe this as I coach young people. It does not take more than 2 or 3 one-hour sessions for them to grasp the point that they can develop themselves and their subordinates through coaching. They learn that they can delegate more, put their feet up more, network better and also have people seeking them as leaders, when they switch from managing through prescriptive solutions to managing by encouraging solutions. Life is never the same again once they learn the art of managing by coaching.

In the process, they feel the joy of working non-judgmentally, focused only on contribution to another. Surprise, surprise, it helps them also grow.

I was taught to manage by mentors who shared their experiences with me and provided me with instant solutions. This didn't usually work. It can only work with the unintelligent or those without options. An intelligent, creative and freedom loving young manager would like to learn for him/herself and at him/her own pace, to match actions and behavior with values and beliefs.

Our Vedic scriptures teach us two valuable truths about learning. The first one is about learning as a shared co-creative activity, as enshrined in the peace verses of the Upanishads.¹⁰ Let's travel together, says the teacher, let's learn as equals with no arguments. Learning is co-creative.

The second is the definition 'sravana-manana-nidhidhyasana' for learning. This can be loosely translated as listening-reflecting-experiencing. Only self-reflection of inputs lead to sustained experience. One's own experience based on reflection is the only value-based, sustainable learning.

⁹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0379225/>

¹⁰ om sahanavavatu sahanau bhunaktu saha viryam karavavahai tejasvinavahitamastu ma vidvisavahai om shanti shanti shantihi.

May we be protected and nourished, as we journey together in learning without differences. May there be peace!

The entire Gita is a lesson in Coaching. Krishna rarely offers solutions. He challenges, goads and sometimes shames Arjuna to get him up to fight. By not taking up arms, he remains the Coach Incarnate.

In Chapter 14 of Gita¹¹, Krishna talks about divine and demonic qualities present in every one of us. Reflection tells us that when we focus on ourselves, we become demons. When we focus on others, we transform as divine. A Coach focuses always on the other.

Our Vedic culture is founded on the gurukul system. Its essence is coaching. The guru never imposes his truth on his disciple. He encourages the disciple to learn the truth.

Both the words 'guru' meaning one who journeys with you from ignorance to wisdom, and 'acharya' meaning one who walks the path with you, are perfect definitions of a coach. Learning through Coaching, a la Upanishads, is the cornerstone of our Vedic culture.

Coming back to these truths was a homecoming to me. It was a refreshing change from the Western psychological models: the behavioral, transpersonal, neurobiological, and ontological processes of people development. These are high-sounding words that are bandied around with no experiential understanding, with the seeming conviction that our own culture offers nothing by way of human development.

A recent survey of NHRD Bangalore amongst pre-work Gen Y¹² showed that youngsters still looked up to parents and family members as role models and turned to them for advice. Today's youth is also extremely clear about what it wants and confident about getting it. These results were quite different from what many of the HR specialists expected from the rebellious Gen Y.

Has our Gen Y suddenly found religion?

Not quite. The Indian ethos is one of respect for

the elder. The current generation too believes that. In addition, it demands that due respect is also given to them. That's what coaching is about. It's about giving respect and creating trust in order to co-create transformational value in the client.

Great and successful organizations of tomorrow will manage by coaching. We now take emotional intelligence for granted as a prerequisite to managerial success. Soon, ethical and spiritual intelligences would become critical to leadership excellence. This is what coaching is all about!

About the Author

Ram S Ramanathan is an executive and business coach, trainer of coaches and leaders, , teacher of MBA programs, author of Vedic spiritual books, and when time is on his side strategic adviser to family businesses and start up operations. In his 45 odd years of 'work', Ram spent about 15 years being mentored in what not to do, 15 years in running companies and groups of companies telling others what to do, 7 years as an entrepreneur and investor doing what he used to tell others to do and not to do, 5 years as a spiritual aspirant and dilettante trying not to do, and the last few years generally content with himself not 'doing'. One lesson Ram learnt in life and wishes he had learnt when he was still quite young is not to follow anyone as a role model. Listening well, but reflecting better, before putting the learning into action and learning from it, focusing on the 'what' in learning rather than the 'who' provided the learning, will save years of tears. Self is the best teacher.

¹¹ <http://www.asitis.com/16/>

¹² Voice of Youth at National NHRDN Conference Bangalore 2011 November
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgXjFt38zAo&feature=youtu.be>