

Professional Coaching: What is it and Why?

This Kind of Coaching Turns the Controls over to the Team

BY JEANETTE SIEMENS



Jeanette Siemens

Coaching is a globally recognized profession but has become more visible in the last few years. No, I'm not talking about baseball or football or gymnastics, but about human achievement in all walks of life. As in athletics of every kind, this brand of coaching leads to higher performance.

I have benefitted tremendously from working with and learning from the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) for several years. Coaching is one of KLC's many training programs for individuals and for groups, all of them based on the premise that anyone—yes, that includes YOU—can perform acts of civic leadership.

So what is this kind of coaching?

First, let me say what it is NOT: it is not advice and not therapy. Also, unlike in athletics, this kind of coach is not the "expert." Experts set the agenda, develop the methods, then transfer the knowledge or train the skill.

But coaching turns the controls over to the team. The coach helps the team understand who they are and what they want then helps them develop a strategy to achieve the goals they aspire to. And, to be effective, coaching takes place on a regular schedule. Remember, this is about improving performance, and that requires regular practice in order to establish new patterns, learn new behaviors and gain new confidence.

In our Public Square work with communities, our colleagues support the individuals who convene steering committees and action teams that are focused on specific goals such as mentoring youth, or building new houses, or changing public policy, or holding a bond election for a new hospital or school. Our coaching may take the form of a telephone conference call with conveners, or an in-person team meeting, or a

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timely reminder to the team to stay on course through tough times.

Coaching isn't a one-way street. I coach, but I also use a coach to improve my own performance.

Recently, I was working with my coach on particular responsibility I felt for someone I care deeply about. My coach asked one key question about what the desired outcome of this situation might be. That question made me reflect on an earlier comment I had made about what I hoped this person would do and the outcome I wished to see. At that point the light switch turned on! The coach, with a single insightful question, helped me see I was trying to manipulate someone else's work in the way that suited ME, not them. That conversation changed the way I interact with this person and we have moved to a much more productive and close relationship. Coaching is so simple and can be so powerful.

As a colleague with Public Square Communities, I apply these coaching skills to volunteer teams working to improve their community. I'm betting you know a church committee, a school board or a county commission that could ratchet up their performance a notch or two. Have they ever talked with them about using a coach? **KCL**

JEANETTE SIEMENS is a colleague of Public Square Communities and a certified leadership coach with the Kansas Leadership Center.