CREATING A
COACHING CULTURE

Assume for the sake of example that you have been put in charge of creating (and eventually sustaining) an organizational culture defined by "coaching excellence." Before you dive in on that assignment, let's make sure we are aligned on the definitional anchors.

- **Coaching:** The art/science of helping those around you get better (to include formal management, peer and upward influence)

- **Culture:** The natural, normal way employees at all levels respond to emergent opportunities and challenges (i.e., predictable behavioral patterns)

In full recognition of the complexity and degree of difficulty associated with this task, we would like to offer the following points of consideration.

EXECUTIVE STEWARDSHIP

Regardless of the product your organization manufactures or the service it provides, your executive team needs to publish a compelling vision and a comprehensive strategy boldly featuring clear performance goals. A foundational component of a coaching culture is that everyone is on the same page, marching in the same direction, toward the same flag at the top of the same mountain.

Effective coaching is anchored by commonality. The whole notion of "getting better" needs to be persistently calibrated by a mutually shared awareness of the ultimate destination, and a laser-like focus on all the milestones that need to be accomplished along the way.

EMPLOYEE EMPHASIS

Traditionally, organizations pursue cultural objectives from the top-down. Comparatively, we would suggest active consideration of an all-inclusive approach that migrates from the frontline-up. Stated differently, high levels of employee engagement are not a by-product of a coaching culture, they are a prerequisite. Employees who take charge of their own engagement can help their managers deliver coaching that is timely, relevant and focused on "the flag at the top of the mountain." Taking charge is primarily a function of understanding in combination with transparency.

Imagine how much easier it is to help someone improve if they provide you with a detailed analysis of where, and perhaps why, they are struggling. The same goes for employees who petition their managers for increased degrees of empowerment based on documented

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high levels of consistent performance. A culture defined by coaching will position employees as the catalysts responsible for accelerating effective decision making, development and goal achievement.

MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE IN ACTION

While a coaching culture is clearly a function of an inclusive vision that sets the stage for active engagement, it must also feature "people managers" who

have mastered the skills of influence and coaching. In that regard, good coaches consistently figure out a way to:

- **Deliver Results:** They understand "the scoreboard" and are in no way intimidated by it. They also accept that the most tangible way to measure their short-term value is by their documented ability to orchestrate organizational wins.

- **Drive Motivation and Retention:** They also have a "personal scoreboard" that extends beyond the organizational bottom line. In short, they deliver the what, but truly excel at the how.

So, how do you build or enhance these skills? By employing a process that demands focused effort in three highly interdependent phases:

- **Reflection:** Effective coaching is a product of thoughtful consideration.

- **Execution:** Good coaches consume relevant data without ignoring their intuition or managerial instincts.

- **Follow-Up:** Good coaches also recognize that what was said during a coaching discussion wasn't necessarily what was understood.

Real life examples of leaders who have established coaching cultures are in short supply. We would refer you to anything you can find on either Alan Mulally or Frances Hesselbein. ⏲

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