



Building a Foundation-Up Culture of **BEHAVIORAL COACHING**

BY NIKKI EVANS AND CAROL POCKLINGTON

A culture of behavioral coaching is not difficult to define, but it can at first be an elusive thing to create.

It is a commitment from leadership to invest in the skills—in themselves and their workforce—required to drive both personal and workplace success.

At its simplest, when individuals discover their inherent behaviors, they can begin to leverage their strengths and account for challenges, creating powerful change across actions, emotional responses, and communication styles that affects individuals, teams and, therefore, organizations.

Behavioral coaching doesn't just set goals, it guides and invests in people. It uses validated tools to reveal and understand behaviors. It has measurable outcomes and processes that demonstrate the degree to which investment into behavioral coaching, of both individuals and teams, delivers success. But behavioral coaching requires leaders to have clearly defined and agreed-upon objectives and vision, coupled with strategic planning.

Once the vision is outlined, a picture emerges of the kind of talents and behaviors essential to deliver objectives. Who has what talents, and how do we best deploy them so that they thrive and the team and organization do as well? Armed with vision, revealed talent, and behaviors, managers have a methodology for enhancing the individual's or team's current skills and behaviors.

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY INSIGHTS?

So how do you uncover innate behaviors, parse strengths, and identify challenges? There are a number of approaches to a discovery process. One example is a probing questionnaire, which by design deliberately removes all situational, cultural, and educational biases so that it consistently and reliably reveals natural behavior—the innate behavior someone may not even realize he or she reverts to.

Administering such a questionnaire can be accomplished in about 10 minutes—less time than it takes for someone to sign up for a dating app. Optimally, it should provide results in real time, though it may naturally require someone with experience to help interpret and apply the insights gained. This person can be the coach and/or someone else in the process.

Still, it is crucial that both the person being evaluated and others in the process—like the coach—have access to and understand the insights.

GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Behavioral coaching is based on a mutual understanding of what makes people tick, what motivates them, and what

environments bring out the best in them. And it can only begin when built on a platform of “knowing me knowing you.” Personal behavioral insight produces a coaching culture. And there is no place for dictatorial command and control in the new behavioral economy. Leaders are increasingly waking up to the realization that they must engage more closely with those tasked to deliver business outcomes if they are to find success in the workplace.

A good starting point when introducing a culture of coaching is for key leaders to experience the benefits of coaching firsthand. Executives who go through the behavioral discovery process and are coached get to understand and appreciate the power of this support and are more likely to champion its introduction into their organizations.

Leaders who fail to mutually connect in the coaching process will not be able to build a coaching culture. For a coaching culture to succeed, it must be driven from the top.

Top-down, leader “sponsorship” also is important because there is an art to coaching. It must include accountability. It can't just be part of a “wish we could do this” list. It takes investment, commitment, and training, and leaders who have experienced the benefits are more likely to embrace it.

DRILLING DOWN

Coaching should always be about developing and empowering individual employees—at all levels—to use their talent, discretion, and judgment to act in ways that are congruent with organizational objectives and goals.

Again, an effective culture of coaching requires leaders to be committed to getting to know their people at a deeper level. Why do people want to work for me? Why should they want to? What are their other motivations? What impediments may be keeping them from going “all in” with a commitment to our organization?

Once leaders from the C-suite on down begin to understand the people who work for and with them, stories and patterns emerge that affect the emotional intelligence of leadership itself. Real conversations that are the basis of coaching cannot fail to build relationships and trust.

From this point, coaching becomes meaningful as behaviors are revealed and understood by everyone through and across the process. Though it is human nature, sadly, to make snap judgments about one another based solely on outward surface connections, when we dig deeper, using appropriate and empowering questions delivered with



sincerity, the conversations are more effective. Generalized assumptions have no place in building and sustaining a workforce that feels genuinely committed to the business.

Organizational behavioral coaching, based on a platform of understanding individuals' inherent behavior, must encompass a deeper understanding of how individuals think, make decisions, and respond to pressure and emotion. Revealing these influences is the major key to introducing a successful and meaningful culture of behavioral coaching.

And this is science, not "soft": Behavioral coaching is measurable. Such analytics can and should be used to communicate and demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of coaching throughout the organization.

MATCHING COACH AND PROTÉGÉ

The pairing of coach and protégé is crucial. Random coach-staff matches are too hit-and-miss. This is where the case for understanding individual behaviors is at its most relevant. The coach and the employee need to be carefully matched based on experience, skills, desired outcomes, and compatible (or complementary) behaviors.

As an example, placing a strong, strategically focused coach with a talented, yet reserved, employee may appear to deliver growth for the employee. In reality, it may close him or her down, scuttling the process. This emphasizes the importance of being fully cognizant of the protégé's inherent behaviors and how to understand and manage them.

A good guidepost phrase for coaches to keep in mind is "Know, Engage, and Grow." This focuses on helping people become more self-empowered through greater self-knowledge. They also get to know and engage with others,

with an understanding of that person's innate behavioral strengths and challenges. Then, individuals, teams, and organizations can grow. (And individuals have the added benefit of improved knowledge, engagement, and growth off the job as well as on.)

Using behavioral insights, we can pinpoint existing culture and strategy misalignments that need to be managed in order to deliver outstanding people performance and business results. But we must start by aligning coach and protégé.

YOU OWN THE CULTURE

There is never just one culture that fits all organizations or one strategy that directs every business. But the common denominator for your team or organization could be that you consistently reveal the inherent behaviors of all individuals and help them manage the differences that can otherwise get in the way. Again, this approach is a foundational key to the coach/protégé relationship.

This behaviorally based common denominator also provides a common language (around behavior and decision making) and accurate and consistent long-term data/insights on which to build more powerful solutions, individually, for teams, or for the organization.

Along with being at the top of every CEO's priority list, a coaching culture should be inculcated into strategic planning. If there is no commitment to invest time and resources into coaching, strategic planning and financial performance will falter. Instituting behavioral coaching without building it into core business processes will fail.

Even if only subtly and subconsciously, external shareholders—such as customers and vendors—know

when employees are treated well. They see evidence in the way committed teams deliver excellent service. Conversely, across all aspects of life, but especially in the business realm, intensified behaviors (caused by unmanaged human differences, pressure, and emotions) not only derail performance but also breed a toxic culture. External audiences read and react to this kind of behavior like an open book.

ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIORAL COACHING IN ACTION

People are born with unique gifts and talents. It's in their DNA. When they can't use them, when they feel unfulfilled, they become dissatisfied, disgruntled, frustrated, and unhappy. They are certainly not working to potential.

At the very least, articulating a strong cultural behavioral coaching ethos is the framework within which individuals can find their purpose and deliver their best. And that's usually a recipe for both individual and organizational success, so a clear case can be made for behavioral coaching and the alignment it brings having a positive effect on the bottom line.

When individuals have knowledge and insight into their own unique behavior and communication style, together with a clear understanding of the value they bring to the business, they and their teams deliver at a higher level. The chaos factor is removed. They know where they are going and can see how the work they do lines up with their life plans.

GIVING LEADERSHIP THE KEYS

Here's some guidance on how to launch behavioral coaching:

Recognize that CEOs are the principal architects of the behavioral coaching culture in their business.

Understanding and reviewing their own behaviors, personal vision, values, and level of engagement with others is critical to the success of behavioral coaching. It starts at the top—often said, but rarely practiced. A CEO who knows his or her own personality, EQ, communication style, biases (yes, we all have them), and personal values is more likely to be able to introduce behavioral coaching than a leader who does not have this insight.

Ask whether your style of leadership is too strict, too controlling, and/or too rational. Do you know? It could be learned behavior, or it might be inherent, but it can be revealed and managed.

Determine what the market is saying about your business. If no one is talking and boasting about the culture of the organization, it's a sure sign there isn't one or, if there is, it's toxic. Introducing behavioral coaching will address this issue.

Take the pulse of and measure the current state of coaching. Maybe not everything needs to change; sometimes, coaching that takes place informally and through osmosis is working. It's not ideal, because understanding

individuals' unique behavior is absolutely necessary, but it's a start and certainly worth building on.

Use a validated personality discovery process to quickly identify those able to own and manage behavioral coaching.

It doesn't always have to be leadership to staff, it can be peer to peer. The key is to know who is coaching "healthily" and in line with company values, and who is coaching based on "rogue" behavior. All of this can be revealed, managed, and measured.

Give people coaching skills training. Help your team understand what coaching is and give them some training on how to ask empowering questions, help people identify action plans, and provide accountability. If you want a coaching culture, invest in teaching coaching skills.

Appoint a coaching manager. Empower this person to work across borders in the business to introduce, facilitate, and maintain the process of coaching.

Keep reviewing and auditing. This is especially important when introducing any kind of change, but particularly a program such as behavioral coaching, to ensure it is relevant and working.

Deliver customized experiences. Remember, employees wish to be treated uniquely, so look at how you can set targets and review performance based on their strengths, provide recognition that is tied to their style, and deliver customized communication across the business.

Do not underestimate the power of leaders' regular communication with team members.

Acknowledge the individuals championing the behavioral coaching program.

Create a vision of what the future of the organization looks like after and as a consequence of introducing the behavioral coaching approach.

THE REWARDS OF A COACHING CULTURE

Offering a strong behavioral coaching program will attract quality talent while maximally leveraging the talent already on board. People are increasingly looking to invest their skills and talents in organizations where "payback" is more than the salary they earn. They want to be seen as worthy of investment in other ways. Better still if the skills and insights they pick up at work can improve life away from work too.

But the real prize of implementing a robust and consistent coaching culture is that individuals take responsibility for what happens in their work areas, and problems are solved where they happen and by those affected. This frees leaders up to focus on the business and its opportunities. [AQ](#)

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