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Newsletter
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Mentor's Musings – Coaching a Buddy

-- By Krishna Kumar ISEC Editor

Recently I was at lunch at the Golf Club with my college buddy (CB), who heads the India operations for a global IT firm and is an avid golfer. Looking around the beautifully manicured golfing greens after a pleasant lunch was soothing to the senses and I almost missed CB's off-the-cuff remark, "Can we have a coaching session?"

The question is unexpected and I started pondering over the reasons for this seemingly casual comment. CB is a successful professional and, as far as I know, has never encountered a career setback. So, what did he want to be coached on? Maybe, he'd heard of my coaching assignment with a mutual acquaintance, CEO of a large engineering firm, and was curious. So, was his request a personal one or did it have professional ramifications?

Coaching a friend is often tricky, especially when we've known each other since teenage. A good coaching conversation needs to be tightly structured within the boundaries established at the start of the process. Plus, the coach needs to function without any preconceived bias. The latter is tough to accomplish in this scenario, given the level of camaraderie that exists between us.

I had to quickly decide my next course of action. Doubtless, it would appear logical to continue the conversation, probe the reasons for CB's remark and decide on my next step thereafter. However, would such a step lead to a situation where a coaching session would become a *fait accompli*?

"Sure." I tell him. After all, one can't refuse a buddy's request and we start our coaching conversation. Was our session comfortable? Were my earlier apprehensions misplaced? In summary, it was not a decision that I regret and would be quite happy to repeat.

There are, however, coaching situations that can cause regret as our Editor and Level-2 Coach, Raj Narayan, describes in the article below.

If you have you encountered similar situations, write to us at kk@intradconsult.com

To Coach or Not to Coach

-- By Raj Narayan

Messrs Sourav Ganguly (former Indian cricket captain) and Greg Chappell (former Australia test captain and erstwhile coach of India's cricket team), have had their daggers drawn ever since the coach got the captain ousted from the team. Chappell in his recently launched autobiographical book has now given his view on the circumstances that led to the ouster.

Chappell mentions in his book that Ganguly had "great batting and leadership talent, but never realized his potential because he was consumed by what he saw as threats around him." This scathing criticism from a coach about his coachee has made headlines in cricket-crazy India.

Without delving into the merits of Chappell's case or that of Ganguly, I found in this comment an excellent example of a perennial dilemma that coaches undergo. In his blog, Marshall Goldsmith says: "Leadership coaching

can be a very valuable process when the coachee's issues are behavioral, they are motivated to change and when they are given a fair chance."

[Read the blog here](#)

But, did Ganguly really want to change? Chappell's further comment suggests otherwise. He states, "He did not want a coach, or an agent of change. He wanted a political ally." Therefore, as a coach, could he have helped him overcome issues of self-doubt fuelled by an all-consuming threat perception?

I do not want to answer this question as opinions may vary. Some believe that it is difficult to make coaching interventions to cure a client's paranoia while others may take up the challenge, provided the coachee is motivated to put in that extra effort to change.

"As Goldsmith says, "it doesn't make much sense to waste time with clients who are NOT going to improve." So, if the then India captain was averse to change and merely sought an ally, should the coach have put in his papers there and then?."

What intrigued me most is the broader issue of cultural upbringing that Chappell points to by suggesting that Ganguly's behavior merely mirrored an individual's intrinsic distrust of someone expressing a contrary viewpoint. Is this an Indian trait or common to others holding a position of power?

Write in to us (kk@intradconsult.com) or (editor@isecindia.in) on what you think about this coaching engagement. Was it destined to fail?

Coaching Notes: The Chandelier (from the stories of Rebbe Nachman)

The Rebbe told:

Once there was a young man who travelled through many distant countries in search of a master craftsman from whom he could learn a trade. After a while he returned home and announced to his family that he had become an expert designer of chandeliers. "I have become so talented in my new-found trade," he explained, "that my work far surpasses even the greatest masterpieces of my teacher." Then, realizing that the family was a bit dubious about the measure of his success, he asked his father to invite the leading chandelier craftsmen in the city to view a sample of his own creation.

The craftsmen came and carefully examined the young man's work. They all agreed that they had never before laid eyes on such a monstrosity. "It's a disgrace to our entire profession," said one, "though this particular piece right here is quite good." "It's absolutely hideous," said another, "but that particular piece over there is excellent." "It should be burned," said a third, "so that others need not suffer the experience. However," he added, "that piece there is perfection itself."



When they had gone, the young man approached his father and said, "Now you know that I was not exaggerating at all, I am indeed the master of all master craftsmen." His father looked at him in bewilderment. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "You heard their conversation; your chandelier is a monstrosity!"

"I heard," replied the young man. "However, did you notice that each of the craftsmen admired a particular piece of my work, but no two craftsmen admired the same piece. For when I was abroad I studied the work of each of these men. Then I decided to make a chandelier which combined all of their imperfections. Today you saw every craftsman recognize the imperfections of his associates, while pointing to his own mistake and seeing it as nearly perfect."

Rebbe Nachman concluded this parable by stating: "If a man could know all the possible imperfections and shortcomings of a given thing, then he would also know the exact makeup and appearance of that same thing in its perfect state, though he had never seen it before."

Programs @ ISEC

A two-day Mentor Coach (Level 1) Workshop was conducted at Bangalore on November 18, 2011. Led by our Founder Coach Krishna Kumar, the ISEC faculty comprising Ravi Neelakantan and Prof. Leo Lobo provided insights into the basics and origins of coaching, the mechanics of coaching as applied to three well known international coaching models, and an awareness of the Coaching Masteries enshrined by the International Association of Coaching (IAC).

P. K. Gopalakrishnan, Paul Samji, Ponappa P.G, Vijay Menon, Balakrishnan P, Lourd Vijay and Prashanth Bhat participated in the program.



Besides providing insights into coaching models and tools, the faculty also underscored the differences between coaching as varied from counseling and consulting. Krishna Kumar later introduced the concept of “Inner Game” coaching to the delegates, who found tremendous universal appeal. “The Inner Game resonated in my head and I was able to ask myself some really tough questions,” said a delegate..

Another important point that was communicated during the two-day workshop related to the importance of practice as coaching is a skill that hardly anyone is born with. The inherent desire to proffer advice is something that can be removed only with a deliberate focus..

The event concluded with a special session on Marshall Goldsmith, conducted by coach Tamal Bhatia who shared some simple nuggets (six of them) that a coach should seek and internalize. The crux of the content was that every successful person need not be a successful coach.

We take this opportunity to wish all the delegates an introspective future and thank the faculty for making the event a fruitful one for them.

**With warm regards,
Krishna Kumar
Executive Coach & Founder-Director, ISEC**