

The Value of Public Coaching

This paper is about coaching in the context of building leadership, and building an organization and its vision, mission, and values.

Most of what we are saying about public coaching applies purely and simply to coaching, whether it is done privately or as a team practice.

What we mean by public coaching is that someone gives another person feedback/encouragement/ advice, etc. in front of others. The person being coached loses no stature, and, in fact gains respect for being open. The people listening gain skill in coaching and information for themselves. Everyone benefits.

We've included tips for giving and receiving coaching at the end of this essay, so skip to the end if you don't want to read all the theory behind the idea of public coaching.

Private coaching/feedback has its place. However, many coaching conversations never happen because it seems impractical to stop in the middle of things for a private conversation.

Or the private coaching conversations do happen and the conversations are brilliant and (as we have said) private. The benefit of learning for other team members is lost. Others who are present miss the opportunity to learn from the coach's insight and the other person's experience.

We all have times when we think of things to say that would make a difference for the other person, and we worry about how to say it or how they will take it. We don't yet trust coaching as an organizational competency.

Public coaching is possible in the context of a loving caring relationship or culture. When people feel free to disagree with each other openly, communication skills grow, people gain affinity, and deeper working relationships become possible.

Someone who is new to public coaching might think public coaching is an invitation to criticize. It's not. Although the uninitiated might "hear" criticism, as leaders model respectful listening, people begin to hear "alternative," "another way," or "another perspective." In a respectful climate, people learn that it is possible to differ without using their differences to attack each other.

Sharing a commitment to common goals and projects, honoring those shared commitments, and honoring the other person are what make public coaching possible and fruitful.

Vast new worlds of possibility open up in relationships and organizations when people practice open communication, coaching, and dialogue. If you really want to experience acceptance, create a culture where honest feedback is welcomed and weighed, and actions are aligned on in service to a shared vision.

Tips for Receiving Coaching

Here are a few ways to quiet your thinking (the "yes, buts..." or "how can they think that?" or "I am so embarrassed") so that you can receive public coaching:

1. Think from the perspective of what you're committed to. Does what the person says make sense in terms of how to forward your commitments?
2. Remind yourself that feedback is a gift given by people who care about you and who are rooting for your success.
3. Remember that making mistakes is part of being human. It is possible to be humble without being ashamed. Being able to listen openly to others' perspectives and use them to forward your personal & professional growth is a mark of maturity.
4. People's honesty is a reflection of their commitment to you and the depth of your relationship. The people who love you offer feedback to make you more effective.
5. It takes courage to give honest feedback. Remember the risk the other person may feel in opening up.
6. The first five points relate to public or private coaching. In public coaching, your openness and authenticity in receiving coaching generously provides an opportunity for others to learn through your example. Your openness also empowers and strengthens the person who offers feedback.

Tips for Giving Coaching

1. You cannot be effective if you don't love the player. Meditation, or some self-reflection, supports you in taking away being judgmental in the coaching. You can only be effective coaching from love.
2. The coaching has to happen in the context of a shared commitment to a larger goal. In some other instances, the person you are coaching is fine as they are, but in the context of the shared commitment, there is an opportunity for development.

3. Make sure you have permission to coach, that the player has agreed to being developed, and to be developed by you.
4. Tell the people who are present what you are doing inside the commitment to the larger goal.
5. Build the coaching relationship on top of acknowledgement and appreciation. Be sure the conversations you have include lots of conversations of gratitude for the other person.
6. Coach in small bites, you don't have to say everything. Say what can be heard and acted upon.
7. Thank the person for their generous way of listening and commitment to the organization or project.
8. Make sure you track the results of the coaching. If they are good results, the person being coached should be acknowledged and get ALL the credit. If not, you should take note and go back to the drawing board to develop yourself as a coach.
9. Have fun and remember point #1. Love.