

The Rise
of the
Coachable
Leader

**7 EXECUTIVE SUCCESS STORIES OF
DEVELOPING *TRUE* COACHING CULTURES**

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My heartfelt gratitude to all of you.

Introduction

In 1995, when I established Crane Consulting, I searched the internet for “coaching cultures.” Three websites came up, one was mine.

Today, you can find hundreds of consulting and training organizations that support the development of a coaching culture.

But not all coaching cultures are equally powerful. Most attempts to create a coaching culture are built on a derivative of one type of coaching: the professional coaching model.

The professional model is a distinct and powerful genre in which the coach (internal and designated, or external and hired) becomes highly skilled at asking probing, learning questions to provoke insights in the client, which in turn, lead to the client taking meaningful action toward their goals. When multiplied by managers and leaders across the organization, professional coaching creates a “coached” culture, where the “few” who are trained in this specific approach are coaching the “many.”

Another coaching genre is called collegial coaching. Collegial coaching consists of conversations between people who work together on the same functional or project team. In these conversations, colleagues share feedback—“coach” to “coachee” or “coachee” to “coach.” The coach and the coachee then collaborate to create a “go forward” commitment to action that both can support. Coaching in this scenario comes from a direct, working relationship, and thereby creates a collaboration with shared accountability for outcomes (unlike the professional coaching genre, which leaves all accountability for making changes and achieving results with the coachee).

Actionable feedback (caring, candid, timely, respectful, and supportive) between colleagues, then, is the basis for their learning and collaboratively solving problems. They build mutual

trust in the process. While effective questions are integrated into the dialogue as a necessary part of the conversation (again, unlike professional coaching, where questions flow from coach to coachee), collegial coaching is feedback-based.

Only collegial coaching, where any colleague can act as the coach in any conversation with any other colleague, can lead to a feedback-rich coaching culture. The “many” are having coaching conversations with the “many.”

Professional coaching, on the other hand, leads at best to a “coached culture,” where the “many” are being coached by the “few.”

Here is my vision for a feedback-rich coaching culture where collegial coaching provides a shared vocabulary, process and skill set. This was first introduced in *The Heart of Coaching* in 1998:

In feedback-rich COACHING CULTURES, all members of the culture courageously engage in candid, respectful coaching conversations with one another, unrestricted by reporting relationships, about how they can improve their working relationships, and individual and collective work performance.

All have learned to value and effectively use feedback as a powerful learning tool to produce higher levels of personal accountability, professional development, high-trust working relationships, continually improving job performance, and ever-increasing customer satisfaction.

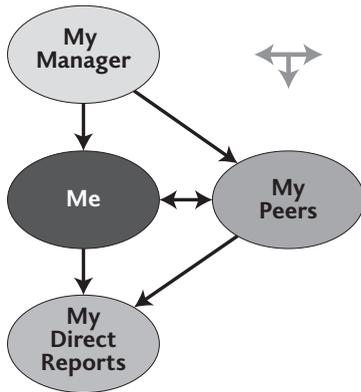
But the core concept that creates a *true* coaching culture is feedback and coaching that flows in all directions up, down, and sideways—and especially UP.

Up, Down, and Sideways

Let’s see what a coached culture looks like alongside a feedback-rich coaching culture.

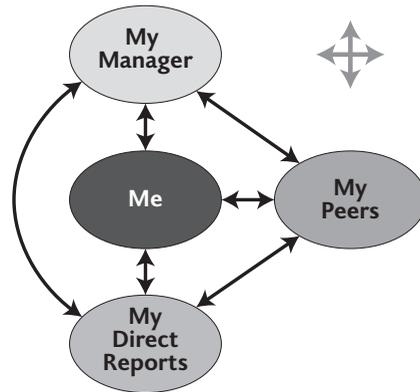
Coached Culture

Coaching (Q's) Down and Sideways



Feedback-Rich Coaching Culture

Feedback and Coaching Up, Down, and Sideways



As you study the figures, what occurs to you? Certainly, in the figure on the left, direct reports would likely be coachable by their direct manager. And, peers might be asking coaching questions of their peers. The main "intervention" would be the designated or hired coach asking learning questions that lead to insights, which leads to actions. That's all good ... as far as it goes.

What are the implications for the quality of communications and decision-making? With questions flowing laterally or from the top down, how would creativity, competitive zeal, candid communication, timeliness, and nimble decision-making be impacted?

Now think about how these dynamics would be different if the flow looked like the figure on the right. How would you characterize the quality and quantity of communications? How effective are decisions likely to be in this scenario? How would engagement and teamwork be impacted?

Which organization would likely have a competitive advantage?

Coachable Leaders are the Linchpin

The influence of senior leaders in creating and shifting organizational culture cannot be overstated. They are role models. They demonstrate what is expected—and tolerated—across the entire organization. The bottom line is that leaders set the tone and pace for the culture they lead.

Everything (quality, responsiveness, trust, teamwork) operates more efficiently when the system provides upward coaching and performance feedback to supervisors, managers, and leaders. Obviously! The upward flow of information is as important as the downward and lateral flow of information.

Therefore, if the system is going to perform optimally, those carrying the mantle of leadership **MUST** be coachable. If they do not coach well—or if they seem unapproachable or un-coachable—they inhibit the flow of feedback from their colleagues and the performance of the organization. Unless they are safe to talk to and able to respond appropriately to the information they receive, the organization will not achieve its full potential.

Coachable leaders are the linchpin of a true feedback-rich coaching culture. Their coachability is the **ONLY** chance for the organization to advance coaching from an organizational exercise to a permanent shift in the fabric of the organization's culture.

So, what does it mean to be coachable? The coachable leader, grounded in humility, curiosity, and intentionality, is willing to solicit, clarify, reflect, and respond to feedback from others.

Unfortunately, leaders often aren't receptive to upward feedback. Often they don't fully appreciate the value of upward feedback. For this reason, the vertical leg of feedback flowing "UP" is the least developed, and the last to develop.

But the upward flow is not optional—it must be developed. You can't reasonably expect that the direct reports of un-coachable leaders will be good at coaching and being coachable. People coach because they are coached. Employees follow the example set by their direct manager. If you want your organization to become a feedback-rich coaching culture, your

Leadership is a lifelong journey of just twelve inches—the distance from head to heart.

Bob Ingram, Basic Course Team Leader at the Army Management Staff College

leaders simply must overcome whatever blocks they have against receiving feedback. This book can help them.

My Purpose

My purpose is to share my 30 years of organizational change consulting in such a way that inspires you to become a coachable leader, from wherever you lead. The practices described in these pages are designed to increase your receptivity and that of your fellow leaders to become the best leaders you can become.

In this book, I explore the rising star of the coachable leader and demonstrate that those who are committed to accepting and responding to upward feedback (that is, showing up coachable) support the development of a true, feedback-rich coaching culture. In this sense, this is not so much a business book as it is a people book. Businesses are full of people looking for better ways to communicate.

This book is for you if you have been:

1. Thinking about culture change and aren't sure where to start
2. Attempting culture change and wondering why it's not working
3. Thinking about enhancing coaching skills across your organization and aren't sure where to start
4. Doing skills training around coaching and wondering why it's not making a difference
5. Suffering from disengaged employees and trying to get them re-engaged
6. Noticing disconnection between your senior leaders and those they lead
7. Hearing about lack of trust of your senior leadership team
8. Longing for an effective way to strengthen organizational leadership skills

9. Trying to create sustainable learning processes across your organization
10. Frustrated by the lack of significant behavioral change from organizational leaders

The concepts detailed in the following chapters will thread the needle through these “symptoms” and demonstrate how leaders’ coachability is the key to breaking through.

You might not agree with every conclusion I reach and recommendation I make. That is fine. Consider the concepts and stories that follow as an invitation to be a discerning and reflective reader.

Please do not consider anything you read here as “the truth.” Consider your own experiences and connect the dots for yourself.

I hope this book will spark a dialogue with your leadership team or within your organization about how these ideas and practices apply to your situation and how they could add significant value to your organization.

Most important: I challenge you to consider your own personal level of coachability. Imagine the learning that could take place if you were to embody the humility and openness required to take in and process feedback from colleagues, friends, and even family members.

Let me leave you with a question. You know Watson, the IBM AI supercomputer? Is Watson coachable?

Okay. Let’s get started.