Mike’s Musings

Hints and Help from Mike Jay

Coaching Effectiveness

One of the things I’ve found interesting over my professional coaching life—since 1988—is the whole focus on coaching effectiveness. In a prior musing in the 2004-4 edition of this journal, I tried to give people some ideas about how to consider credentialing for coaches.

While it is not wrong to consider coaching effectiveness, it is inefficient to do so directly. Let me explain. For people in organizations who select coaches, they really want effective coaches. I don’t think there is a debate on how efficient being effective actually is in organizations. As long as efficiency and effectiveness leads or promotes sustainability, we’ve got a pretty good formula, play on words aside. Yet, if you focus on coaching effectiveness, your focus just fell on a trailing, rather than leading indicator!

Many studies I read on what coaching produced, or so called coaching effectiveness studies, isn’t worth the paper they are written on. While I’m no research expert or for that matter even a trained scientist, like one of my clients from West Virginia told me once, in their colloquial wisdom, “you don’t need to be a chicken to know an egg!”

What’s more I’ve seen this propagated through good intention using all of the great authorities in coaching and of course adopted by those “coaching associations, organizations and credentialing bodies; which I too, must claim to be a part of in the end. Essentially the dialogue is around coaching effectiveness and while it’s not wrong, it’s inefficient to start there. Did I say that already? After all, this is just a musing, isn’t it? In any case, let me say what I want to say and let you get on with your life, work and pursuit of happiness.

If you focus on coaching effectiveness, you’ll miss the boat and make a lot of poor selections. Over time, with the help of people like unsung public heroes like Chris Argyris and others, who himself wrote a book everyone in the coaching and consulting business should read called Flawed Advice and the Management Trap, I’ve learned to look beyond coaching effectiveness to client effectiveness. When you begin your journey here two things are going to happen.

1. You’ll probably identify the real problem creator vs. surface manifestations (problems).
2. You’ll know if coaching is the most efficient solution.

I see more coaching fail because it’s not the most efficient solution than for any other reason. It’s not that the coach wasn’t demonstrating effectiveness, but that the match for the problem and the solution are inefficient. You keep hearing me muse about efficiency and effectiveness, don’t you? Ok, what I mean by efficiency has to do with the utilization of resources during throughput—you remember your basic systems course: inputàthroughputàoutput? Effectiveness has to do with alignment of that system to produce what I call RightAction™ — right people, doing the right things, in the right way, at the right time, for the right reasons, to get the RightResults™.
HOW will WHOM lead WHO to do WHAT WHERE WHEN and WHY?

ABILITY
- People are screened, interviewed & hired based on their ability to do the job

RESOURCES
- People have the appropriate RESOURCES to complete the work assigned

STANDARDS
- People have clarity about what constitutes success and measure it with objectivity

FEEDBACK
- People get regular performance feedback

DESIGN
- Natural behavior is supported and rewarded through the pyramid of success

CAPABILITY
- People know how to do the job, when to do it and why it is to be done in the design

EFFORT
- People put energy into doing the work and demonstrate high levels of commitment

PERFORMANCE
- People perform according to standards with flexibility

DEVELOPMENT
- People develop ability to perform more efficiently over time with resilience.

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Take a look at the chart (Figure One) I’ve adopted over time working in organizations, where I try to help people (through dynamic inquiry, a form of coaching we use) to discover the most efficient and effective solutions.

The key things to notice about this metasystem of efficiency and effectiveness is that it’s not the truth, it’s just some ideas that will help an organization make certain they get coaching effectiveness. One, because they already have client effectiveness and system effectiveness outlined in terms of what is required to produce RightAction™ and RightResults™ to of course — don’t forget — create sustainability.

Now, I made you go through all of that so I could give you the real stuff of this musing. During our last executive coach summit held in Quebec City, Quebec, Canada, I asked the group there to do a little “primary research” exercise with me around coaching. I asked them to pair up and to take four minutes a piece to disclose to each other the answers to four questions. The questions and the results of the survey are catalogued for you at: www.executivecoachsummit.com/exercise.

Here’s the meat of the story if you’re pressed for time:

While the results from this exercise are far from predictive, they are interesting in terms of how coaches may talk about what they do, how they do it and to whom they work within the practice of coaching — in other words, how they create coaching effectiveness.

It’s relatively clear from the results that there are a lot of ways in which to define, describe, offer and conduct executive coaching. I suspect we would see the same results if we used any group in coaching, credentialed or not, for the same survey.

I have written extensively on the concept of client effectiveness over the years and how coaching effectiveness is not a predictor of results with clients due to a variety of reasons. The continued emphasis on coaching effectiveness is inefficient in most cases and asks the wrong question in my view. It’s not what the coach is capable of doing, but what the client or recipient of coaching is capable of doing in the context and conditions of the system. This effectiveness is the leading indicator for coaching effectiveness and is the key determining factor for coaching selection — both in its application and its delivery. In the end, it’s not coaching effectiveness that counts… as we know from it’s definition coaching effectiveness is an effect, not a cause. The ability to generate solutions that are efficient, effective and sustainable, while confronting reality is what really matters.

Here’s my muse.

When you hear people and organizations pontificating coaching effectiveness, just realize they haven’t differentiated the problem making system enough to really know how to match people and solutions. Coaching Effectiveness is something of a discussion that is jargon that has been made to seem like a principle; when nothing can define it except results over time and in most cases, it’s not likely to be reproduced from client to client in the same manner.

If you do find something that is reproduced from client to client, it won’t be coaching, but good management and leadership — and that’s saying something in today’s world where the next time you look around, a value-oriented system has usurped your competitive advantage because they aren’t worried about coaching effectiveness but generating efficient, effective and sustainable solutions that work; no matter what credentials you have, no matter what school you’ve been to, or what program you attended. <Rant off.>

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