

## **#1 What makes effective coaching? (pp.xviii-xix)**

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Bacon, T. R. & Spear, K.I. (2003). *Adaptive Coaching: The Art and Practice of a Client-Centered Approach to Performance Improvement*. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black.

Coaching holds much promise, but there is a serious need to improve on what it currently delivers. Improvement will come only from a sober and realistic look at what coaching can and cannot do, not from hyperbolic claims. Coaches must be clear and realistic about what they are offering and why. They must hold the line about what coaching is and is not. And clients must be encouraged to be thoughtful in defining what they want and need. Once the ground rules are set, clients and coaches can determine what falls in the realm of coaching and what may more properly belong in other kinds of helping situations, such as psychotherapy, family therapy, formal education, and spiritual guidance. The coach may serve usefully as a conduit to other kinds of helping interventions. The coach can also define fully what coaching can provide, such as gathering and interpreting performance feedback; career planning for personal and professional development; improving interpersonal and leadership or management skills; mediating team relationships; analyzing career roadblocks and setbacks; uncovering blind spots and assumptions that limit the client's abilities; helping clients stick with and assess progress on an agenda; and serving as a confidential, disinterested sounding board to deliberate on alternative courses of action and business strategies.

In spite of this vast potential for coaching, in reality there is only the skimpiest of empirical evidence for what happens in a relationship, why it happens, and what makes it effective or ineffective. Instead, most coaching theory and practices reside in the vivid anecdotal accounts of successful practitioners, where all kinds of variables from personal charisma to the halo effect of receiving special attention from a coach cloud a genuine understanding of the dynamics and techniques of good coaching. This lack of an empirical foundation has not

inhibited practitioners or authors from advocating their approaches or from publishing their views” (p.59). If coaching is to capitalize on the promise it holds, we need to understand more specifically what constitutes effective coaching in the eyes of the client. What we have learned over the last decade, by listening carefully to the wants and needs of coaching clients and analyzing their responses, is that effective coaching must first and foremost be *adaptive*. By this we mean that coaches must be skilled at adapting their methods, techniques, and approaches to the needs of their clients - both personally and contextually. Throughout this book, we will report some of the tens of thousands of responses we’ve heard from coaching clients to the question, “What could your coach do to be more effective?” Their answers indicate a crying need for coaches to be more adaptive. Here are a few representative responses:

- *Use different coaching styles; ask more questions.*
- *Become more patient during coaching sessions and take more time for the concerns of those being coached.*
- *Release your own agenda.*
- *Be more open in helping the coachee develop his ideas rather than providing him direction.*
- *Help the person being coached consider the culture and what will actually work in the organization rather than a pure view of what is best in a vacuum but may not fly in practice.*
- *Take more time to find out the history of the individual (what he has done, good and not so good, his experience).*
- *Be more open to developing my ideas rather than providing me with direction.*
- *In my opinion, it is important to view coaching more as a part of a long-term developmental process, instead of a way to solve specific performance problems.*
- *Ask coachees more where they see improvement potential by themselves. Match their point of view with her observations and work out individual development plans with defined tasks, milestones, and feedback loops together with the coachees.*