

## **Coaching Basics for Regional Coordinators and Group Leaders**

### **What is Coaching?**

The assumption behind coaching is that something can be made better or improved at an individual level. The need for improvement arises when someone realizes that they are not accomplishing what they want to accomplish (either on behalf of themselves, a group, or an organization). The coach's role is to help an individual recognize where they are "stuck" or how their problems might be linked to personal barriers and blind spots, and help him/her devise strategies from removing the barriers and/or getting around them. But it is also about learning **why** those personal barriers existed in the first place so that the coachee can recognize and manage them him or herself in the future.

### **Some Descriptions of the Coaching Process**

- Excellent coaching is the artful use of questioning, listening and observation. It requires respect and trust on the part of the coach, not just the volunteer. Questioning and listening are a demonstration of respect.
- The essence of executive coaching is helping leaders get unstuck from their dilemmas and assisting them to transfer their learning into results for the organization (creating results and the ability to self-correct in the future).
- Coaching is a process that fosters self-awareness and that results in the motivation to change, as well as the guidance needed to change.
- Coaching is not telling people what to do: its giving someone a chance to examine what they are doing in light of their intentions.
- Our job as coaches is to gain an understanding of how the volunteer views a particular situation or problem and then, in partnership, create new perspectives on the situation or problem so that the actions that follow bring about the desired results.

### **How Coaching is Different from Other Kinds of Help**

- Coaching is not about giving advice or telling people what they ought to do.
- A good coach may or may not have the subject or skill knowledge of the person being coached (subject knowledge is helpful, but not always necessary). In this way coaching is different from mentoring, consulting, or apprenticeship.

### **What is Coaching About in RESULTS?**

As stated above, the assumption behind coaching is that something can be made better or improved at an individual level. But coaching in an organizational context has a greater purpose as well. As Regional Coordinators and Group Leaders, the goal of our coaching is multi-level. Through coaching we are seeking:

- Skill development (powerful speaking and writing) and personal development (breakthroughs in exercising their personal and political power) on behalf of the people we are coaching,
- Team development as more skilled and empowered team members are developed, and
- Organizational success as we become more effective in creating the political will to end hunger and poverty because volunteers are more effective at what they do.

## What is Required of the Coach?

- Skills in listening, giving and receiving feedback, asking probing questions, suspending judgment, recognizing and expressing feelings, paraphrasing
- Developing a stance of wanting to understand the coachee's situation, challenges, and desires and an unequivocal commitment to the coachee's development.
- An environment of trust and respect between the coach and the coachee- being honest, non-judgmental, patient, and authentic. Good interpersonal skills.
- Mapping of Progress- Having a clear understanding of what the short-term and long-term goals are in the coaching situation, knowing when progress has been made, and celebrating success and growth.
- An understanding of resistance- Resistance can show up as denial, defensiveness, or resignation. Resistance of some sort is almost inevitable, but it is often a gift and a sign that says, "Hey, the barrier or challenge revolves around this". Concerns around areas of resistance should be surfaced and explored.
- Self-Management- Disciplining oneself to listen, question, and remaining present (not wandering off in one's own thoughts and/or judgments) in the coaching relationship. Staying focused on how the Group Leader's or volunteer's development will benefit him/her, his/her team, and RESULTS.

## What is Required of the Person Being Coached?

- Readiness- the Group Leader or volunteer must be open to self-examination and the likelihood that he/she will have to make some personal and/or behavioral changes. He/She may not always be ready to be coached right away, so it is the coach's job to create an environment of trust and respect, and help the Group Leader or volunteer to see the need for change. You cannot coach someone who is not ready to be coached.

## Steps in the Coaching Process

### 1. Agreeing on the Work to Be Done. During this step you:

- Establish or reinforce trust and respect in the relationship
- Listen, follow your natural curiosity with questions
- Show that you understand the volunteer's main concerns
- Give feedback- your immediate, here-and-now, experience of with the volunteer is telling you
- Help the volunteer identify and measurable goals
- Gather information on your volunteer's or Group Leader's situation that will clarify barriers

### Coaching Questions You Can Use During this Step:

- a) What challenges are you facing?
- b) Have you met this challenge successfully before (to establish if they already know how to do something in this situation or another situation)?
- c) What is your best thinking about the issue?
- d) What is keeping you from getting the results you want?
- e) How have you responded to the issue?
- f) Do you have any sense of your part in not meeting the challenge this time?
- g) How urgent are you? How much time do you have to achieve this?
- h) What do you find personally challenging about this effort given the results you have to date?
- i) How do you think I could be useful to you?

### 2. Action Planning. During this step you:

- Help the Group Leader or volunteer identify a specific next step

- Focus the Group Leader or volunteer on the pattern she or he needs to change
- Anticipate and help the Group Leader or volunteer plan creatively for the push-back to the change

Coaching Questions You Can Use During this Step:

- a) What do you want to accomplish in this effort? What outcomes do you want?
- b) What would be the achievable results and the specific timeframe?
- c) What would successfully fulfilling these goals look like? How would you measure it?
- d) What is your best thinking about the issue?
- e) What behaviors need to be different in team members to accomplish the results?
- f) What challenges do you personally feel in pulling this off?
- g) What behaviors will you need to enhance or change?
- h) How does this challenge fit into goals you have for yourself?
- i) To what extent to the people you are working with on this hold the same perspective or urgency that you have?
- j) Does your team know as much about what you are thinking as I know now?
- k) What do you know and what don't you know? Can you be clear about both? What information and support do you need from whom?
- l) How clear have you been about your expectations of others?
- m) Are these expectations compromised in some way by the surrounding context?
- n) Are you the decision maker? What decisions will you make and which will you delegate?
- o) What strengths do you have as a leader that you want to preserve and build upon?

3. Active Coaching. During this step you:

- Create or use live situations for coaching. Note: When you are coaching in a live situation (a Group Leader call or outreach meeting, for example) make sure everyone involved understands the structure and purpose of the coaching.
- Follow the Group Leader's or volunteer's goals (stay active, but stay out of the way)
- Foster pattern breaking for more effective action on the part of the Group Leader or volunteer

Coaching Questions You Can Use During this Step:

- a) What pattern are you playing out with the other person? Is the pattern effective? If not, how does it detract from your success?
- b) What does the other person do or not do that triggers your response? Does this interaction have a familiar ring to it? Can you count on people (yourself included) to react in familiar ways? Is this so recurring that you could "Name that Tune"? How would it be identified as a news headline?
- c) How do you encourage others to keep doing the things you don't like? What is your contribution to this pattern? What do you do that starts them down that path in the first place?
- d) What pulls you off course?
- e) What can you do to stay on course? And then what can you do when that doesn't work? And then what can you do? Etc?

4. Debriefing and Evaluation. During this step you:

- Encourage the Group Leader or volunteer to self-assess his/her strengths and challenges around the behavior patterns you are trying to change
- Give both supportive and challenging feedback
- Help the Group Leader or volunteer plan her/his next step
- Invite the Group Leader or Volunteer to give you feedback on your coaching

Coaching Questions You Can Use During this Step:

- a) How do you think you did?
- b) To what extent did you achieve your goal? What did you do well?

- c) Did you establish a pattern that enhanced the interaction?
- d) What internal cues can you identify when you get into this pattern (either for a pattern that works or one that doesn't work i.e. my stomach tightens, I feel more energetic when I speak that way, etc.)?
- e) What loose ends around decision-making, participation, and so forth need to be clarified?
- f) What challenges do you continue to face?
- g) What next step do you want to take?
- h) What do you want to strengthen or change or as we work on this together in the future?

## Coaching Tips

1. Focus on success and progress versus lack of- glass is half full versus empty
2. Stay with behavior that can be changed versus trying to make people shorter or taller
3. Use data/information as a tool, not a hammer- use it to quantify or clarify what do you mean
4. Watch for areas of stuckness- i.e. you know how to do this, why haven't you?
5. Be careful of labels- i.e. this person is passive-aggressive or narcissistic
6. Any series of changes needs a lot of support- just because it is logical does not mean it is easy.
7. Insights and discussion can be a defense against action- insights are not enough- "what are you going to do about it?" is the real question.
8. Check for learning during the coaching process- remind the Group Leader or volunteer of their learnings (hence the importance of tracking progress), do reality checks to highlight differences before and after, celebrate progress.
9. Model giving feedback, listening, and other behaviors you want the Group Leader or volunteer to exhibit.

## Coaching Situations

### Situation #1- Encouraging Success

A long time partner (and former Group Leader) would like to help partners experience success in their advocacy efforts. On several occasions partners have written letters but they have not been published, so they are somewhat discouraged. Personally, the long-time partner has had several letters published and knows she could have others published. But she does not want to be the only one to have letters and op-eds published and she doesn't want to impose herself as the one who has all of the answers. How might we coach her in this situation?

*Analysis: The long-time partner wants to help develop others, but doesn't know what process to use to achieve that goal. So she just encourages her partners, but does little to help them make true progress.*

### *Possible Questions:*

- a) *What is the challenge you are experiencing?*
- b) *Did you see the letters that the other partners wrote? If yes, do you think they could have been improved?*
- c) *How are people feeling about not having their letters published? Sounds like success is important right now if they are feeling discouraged.*
- d) *How might partners improve their letters? What is your best thinking on this?*
- e) *Do you think that the partners would be willing to have input on their letters? If not, do you think they could be convinced of the value of having another set of eyes review their work?*
- f) *What might the group do to see that partners have an opportunity to receive feedback on their letters before sending them on?*

- g) *What is the biggest challenge for you in all of this?*
- h) *Brainstorming- Have you ever heard of a writer's circle? Reading letters aloud at a meeting? Offering to edit the letters?*
- i) *So, what will be the next step in addressing this challenge? What step do you want to take? By when?*

### Situation #2- Frustrated with the Group

A Group Leader is working with a very small, loose group of volunteers. Some of the volunteers agree to take certain actions, but do not follow through. The Group Leader is frustrated with this and wants to "write off" certain of the volunteers. You know that writing off the volunteers will essentially dissolve the group. How do you coach the Group Leader?

#### *Possible Questions:*

1. *Give me an example of the problem you are talking about. How does it make you feel? How do you react?*
2. *Do the volunteers know how you feel? Are they aware of the consequences of their actions?*
3. *What pattern are you playing out with the volunteers that do not follow through? Is the pattern effective? If not, how does it detract from your success?*
4. *What is your part in the problem?*
5. *Have you ever been in this kind of situation before? How did you deal with it then?*
6. *What might be some things you could try here that would change the pattern?*
7. *So, what are your next steps?*

### Situation #3- Bringing in New People

A Group Leader or volunteer is having problems recruiting new people to RESULTS. They conclude that people just aren't interested and have stopped trying. One of the four Outreach Meeting periods is coming up soon (after the International Conference, for example) and you are coaching someone on inviting people to the meeting.

#### *Possible Questions:*

1. *You say that you have tried inviting people to meetings in the past, but have had little success. Why do you think that is?*
2. *Can you tell me about how you tried to recruit people in the past? What did they say and how did they react? Who did you talk to- what groups or individuals? What did you say? What happened when you asked them?*
3. *Ask me to come to a meeting the way you asked them.*
4. *What do you think about how you asked? Would you be excited if you heard the same thing from someone? Let me tell you my reaction...*
5. *Tell me about how you first heard about RESULTS and why you got involved- tell me your RESULTS story. What got you excited about RESULTS?*
6. *Do you think that the way you ask people conveys the excitement that brought you to RESULTS? Can you use this story to bring others in?*
7. *What kind of people would be excited about hearing a story like yours? Let's make a list.*
8. *At the beginning of our discussion you said that when you tried to recruit people that they weren't interested. Do you think that is completely true, or do you think you had some role in how you people reacted to your invitation?*

### **Resources**

O'Neill, Mary Beth. Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart. Jossey-Bass, 2002.  
 Flaherty, James. Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others. Elsevier, 1999.