

SENIOR EXECUTIVES' DISCUSSION: THE FUTURE OF COACHING IN CORPORATIONS

By Madelon Maupin Miles

In a candid panel discussion, attendees of the Professional Coaches and Mentors Association annual conference ("Conversations that Transform the Future") heard "insiders" talk about why coaching works in their organizations, and how they use coaching.

We invite you to see what these senior HR and line managers have learned and use their wisdom to guide you as you consider those who may need coaching in your organization and what to look for and consider.

Madelon Miles was moderator of this stellar line-up of panelists including: Luchus Smith, vice president, human resources—Universal Studios; Jane Cruz, senior vice president, human resources—Hot Topic; Beverly Thelander, sr. vice president, strategic planning and operations—AECOM; Kathleen Gaines, assistant director, administration, Getty Conservation Institute; and Sherri Nadeau, senior vice president, human resources, Savvis Communications Corp.

Speaking to a room of 250 external coaches who probably impact at least 2,500 California organizations, here are brief excerpts of questions asked and insights given.

Madelon: *Why do you see coaching as an important tool in the development and future of your organization?*

Beverly:

"I firmly believe coaching is the best investment a company can make in developing an individual. Given that most companies will indicate that people are their most important asset, it becomes critically imperative for any company. It is one of the best, most effective ways to affect change. Modifying behavior 'on the margin' leads to stronger individual performance and results. And I say, 'on the margin' because one cannot change an individual, but one can use coaching to create greater appreciation for others. Having a culture exposed to coaching creates a performance driven environment, which is critical for development and for retention."

Luchus:

"I found that coaching needs to be part of the *culture*. When there's a conscious attempt to create collaboration, then it's okay when people are giving feedback to one another, getting it side-by-side as coworkers and team players. A coaching culture, a dialogue culture once that buy-in is there, people collaborating and communicating together, the goal is to make that the bottom line of our performance dialogue."

Jane:

"In today's economic environment, we need to ask ourselves, 'Who are our competitors?' One of the things we're very focused on is communication. The better positioning you have on the front

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—Luchus Smith, vice president,
human resources at Universal Studios

line, the more competitive you are, the more accountability people have, the more satisfied they are, and the better the customer service is which is passed on to your customer. So there's a chain of events that happens that's ultimately good for your business. And in order to do that, you have to be willing to invest time and energy into coaching people. The happier they are—that is passed on to your customer. For us, coaching is a way of life, and we look at it as how can we get better and better at it."

Madelon: *What is the toughest part of developing coaching skills within your organization?*

Sherry:

"There has been no coaching internally since my company's inception—and I've only been there three months—so

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I'm really trying to raise the level of awareness among the executives and then show some quick results and then have those people understand that this is beneficial to them, for their career. They have never even experienced this before. It will happen though; people will show up on my doorstep."

Jane:

"The toughest part of developing coaching skills is trying to find the time to do it—because it is an investment of time, and having the faith that it will pay off in the end. We're in a fast paced environment—no matter how committed everyone is. We've got to step back and realize it's really good in the long term, and take the time to do it. There's also a piece of ego or challenge, too. It's hard to hold yourself back from saying, 'I have the answer and I'm going to share that with you.' Really stepping back and coaching it out of someone else can be a challenge, yet rewarding too. Also there is the sincerity of it. It can be very difficult to not push someone to get the answer you want to get out of them – because you're in a hurry, you have the answer in your mind and you want to get to it. Teaching people to become coaches along the way is a process."

Beverly:

"Managers are untrained and unmotivated when it comes to coaching because they've come up through the ranks as an 'individual contributor' and often times when they're given a managerial role, they're not given any training. They're unmotivated, because some of the same behaviors that have helped them be successful today are

the ones you want to modify. So those behaviors have been reinforced overtime, and you're trying to break

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—Jane Cruz, senior vice president,
human resources at Hot Topic

a pattern. They're also unmotivated, because it's human nature not to enjoy feedback, even positive feedback. Provide a toolkit and guidance for people. Create joint accountability. Just because your boss may not be good at coaching, doesn't let you off the hook for not learning to do it and implementing it yourself."

Madelon: *How do you coach your managers to have challenging conversations and be successful in them?*

Beverly:

"I model behavior all the time. If you're not modeling behavior, people won't believe you. Are you discussing those attributes when you have staff meetings? Are you asking, 'How's it going with your coaching?' Use explicit action plans and incorporate them into annual goals. Constantly reinforcing day-to-day. Broadening the involvement. Who is going to help you? You need to pull other people

in. Sometimes others are better at driving home the message than you are. Finally, you need to demonstrate that

there are greater risks in not changing than there are in changing."

Kathleen:

"The fiercest conversations are actually a lot of little conversations. And there's a very important step that comes before that allows you to have those little conversations, and it's about expectations. It's about establishing the behaviors that are appropriate within our work environment. It's about talking with your group about how you're going to work together."

Jane:

"Walking the talk—you really need to exhibit the behavior day in and day out if you expect people to follow. One thing that I've noticed when coaching is planned for and done right, people are so happy afterwards. It doesn't matter what the outcome was, they knew they did it right. So there's almost an ethics issue in the process, which is that feeling that comes with

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knowing you did the right thing. Celebrating what went well encourages people to use coaching again and again.”

Madelon: *What do you see is the future of coaching within organizations?*

Luchus:

“Smaller companies are more nimble and entrepreneurial in spirit and are growing rapidly and have access now to technology that only larger companies had before. Retaining assets that can, quite frankly, be stolen very easily by these smaller competitors, is most importantly, people. And this goes back to the culture—how can a company differentiate itself? And a large part of it has to do with building a culture that is collaborative and one that has its focus on developing its people; one that has a feel for building the organization and the bottom line together.”

Sherry:

“I think that very often you need to have an external coach initially working with a person on a face-to-face basis. As much as we all love coaching and have a passion for it, unfortunately we have a lot of other things that we have to get done as well. I would love to personally coach the executives in my organization, but I don’t have the time to do all of them.”

Thank you to these executives for their time and dedication. If you are interested in executive coaching in your organization, please contact Milestones at any time.



Madelon Maupin Miles, Co-founder and President of Milestones, Inc., is an experienced business executive with both a strong management and entrepreneurial background. Milestones, Inc. is a firm that helps senior management develop leaders, solve team issues, and change and integrate cultures.

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