Member's Quarterly   Summer 2017 Edition

Feature

Cracking the Code to Behavioural Change

The art of being humble

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People are sent to a "soft skills" course and their managers hope they come back "changed". When the behavioural change doesn't happen, or at least not to the degree desired, the course and/or the instructor are often to blame. This is the scourge of the training industry. And it all starts with expectations.

If you send someone on a computer course, you *expect* them to use the skills. Typically, when these skills are needed to perform the job (technically), they get used right away and are often enhanced with progressive success. Furthermore, the result of the work done creates immediate accountability. If the person makes a mistake, there will be real time corrections from the person's boss or peers. So the problem with soft skills training is that leadership does not set out the same expectations for things like sales skills, leadership skills, communication skills, etc. Instead, it becomes a "check the box" mentality and the learner forgets most of what was covered. Alternately, they return saying, "Good course, but I know all that." The question should not be "Do you know that?" It should be "How good are you at that?"

Unlike technical training where people expect immediate and progressive results, soft skills training becomes less tangible and the horizon for behavioural change becomes lost. People are less likely to point out shortcomings of others in these behaviours usually because there is a lack of vulnerability based trust and therefore there will be no accountability to change.

So what can be done? I believe it has to start with the individual. In his most recent book, "The Ideal Team Player," Patrick Lencioni suggests there are three virtues that an individual needs to master in order to be a high contributor to any team. These virtues are Humble, Hungry and Smart. Of the three, Humble is the most important and is also the most lacking, especially in leadership roles. In order to be "coachable," one needs to be humble. Otherwise, there will be no acknowledgement of the behavioural changes required to become a better leader, salesperson or any other role that requires dealing with people.

Being humble will greatly affect how coachable a person is. I borrow from a blog written by Sal Sylvester (Founder of Coachmetrix): "If your participants aren't coachable, there's no point in including them in a program. Our pucker-factor red flag goes off when companies come to us to "fix" their employees. That's not what coaching is about and it's likely that both the manager and the employee aren't coachable. How do we define coachability? Well, when we looked this one up on Merriam-Webster, nothing showed up. So, here's our definition. Coachability is a dimension that describes whether a participant is *open* to feedback and *willing* to change. The participant has to be both open and willing in order to be coachable, and if they aren't coachable, there's no sense in coaching them."

Beyond the individual, it also takes support and commitment from others, including the person's leader. Any skill development takes repetition, repetition, repetition. While this is happening, it can be greatly enhanced by lots of feedback from the support group which also requires complete honesty.

So, cracking the code to behavioural change requires that a person is humble and vulnerable with those who can help. In addition, leaders need to *expect* this of themselves and others.

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