

Members Quarterly

Fall 2013 Edition

feature

Hold Them Big: How Your Thinking Influences Others' Growth and Productivity

Free up time for your own work

What are the chances you think everyone in your organization is as capable as you are? Let us examine our attitudes about how we think of others' capacity. We'll have to look at the implications of our attitudes. Ask yourself how your attitude about others impacts their ability. We will have to shift from having all the answers to becoming a champion and coach instead.

Many leaders are responding to "doing more with less" by working longer hours, taking on more responsibility and burning out. Why? We think it stems back to a long held belief that "it's easier to do it myself." From where does this belief come? It comes from the challenges of transitioning to a new role without having the time or opportunity to examine or develop the leadership skills required. There are inherent challenges associated with the shift from technical expert to leader of people. It's sometimes hard to take the time to teach others when we know we can get it done quickly by doing it ourselves. It's equally difficult when we are not sure if others will do it as well or as quickly as we would. When we don't create the opportunities for others to step into the challenges or to learn as they go because we are afraid they might fail, we "hold them small."

We start thinking this way when we behave as though our value is in our subject matter expertise and in having answers or the ability to solve problems. We are hard wired to solve problems. What if we shifted this thinking? We believe there is value in using questions to enable others to find the answer. When we rush to provide an answer, we actually rush to rescue. We teach people to rely on others rather than on thinking for themselves. We also teach them that they don't have to be responsible for finding solutions. All of this usually happens without our awareness. We are not deliberately holding the desire for someone else to fail. Unless we've done the work of self-discovery to understand self and the impact our behavior has on others, we are unaware of the costs to both of us. So what do we do now?

To start, examine your own attitude about the value you bring.

What has made you successful in the past? How good are you at creating opportunities for others' growth? How quick are you to provide an answer when someone comes with a problem? How ready are you to let people try or to let them make a mistake? What do you believe will happen to how you think about yourself if you don't have to provide the answer? Where will your value come from? What will it take for you to "let go" in order to "let others?" What are the conclusions you draw from asking yourself these questions? What does it say about your leadership



Gail Boone



Carla Hurley

Members Quarterly

Fall 2013 Edition

feature

style? Examining our attitudes requires deep self-reflection and brutal honesty. While it can be a scary place for leaders, it is a great place of learning with the potential for real growth.

Secondly, examine your impressions and beliefs about others.

Ask yourself what is it about this person that holds your thinking that they are not as capable, competent or have the potential to grow? What have I taught them about relying on me for the answers? How is my always providing the answer affecting their ability to find out for themselves? How does my belief about having to do it myself limit their opportunity for growth? What might they be capable of if I offered to work differently with them asking instead of telling? What do I need to shift in my thinking to hold them capable? This usually requires a significant shift in attitude and a huge leap of faith.

Next, host a conversation with them.

Find out what their growth aspirations are. Examine the impact of your subject matter expertise on them. Now here is a tricky part. They too will see the value in your expertise. They might want you to provide the answer because it takes some of the risk away from them. They can blame you if it fails. Once again, this usually plays out in an unconscious and unintentional way. It can be tough to shift. We have to get curious for growth to occur. An opposite of growth is dependency. Our systems can't be sustained with dependency. So, while it might be challenging to push through to the other side of dependency to independence, the journey is worth it. Ask how you might partner with them to grow their capability and confidence. Ask them how they would like for you to support them in their growth.

Then, let go.

Resist the urge to rescue, to jump in and answer all questions. Sure there may be some questions that are necessary for you to answer. Those are the ones where true urgency, safety or quick and decisive action is necessary to come from you. Most questions though can be turned back to the one asking to encourage his or her growth. Coach them with questions such as where might you find the answer to that question? What other sources besides me are available to you to help you find the answer? What have you tried so far? How has what you've tried so far worked? What's on the list of options? Which options do you like best? What are the risks of proceeding in this way? What is the downside of proceeding in this way? What other factors do you need to consider if this approach is to be successful? What resources do you need? You will find this actually shifts your relationship and creates a different level of trust and positivity.

Finally, check in.

Ask them about their progress. Step in with acknowledgement and further coaching as their journey to self-discovery progresses.

When we shift to coaching others, we actually create -success for them and for us. When we "hold them big", we signal trust and confidence. When others see that we believe in them, they start to believe in themselves. They take more risks, get more creative and become more productive and capable. When they do, we start noticing they come to us for different things. They stop asking the questions they could answer themselves and come to us when they really need help. This actually frees up capacity for the important work. Leaders notice a shift in their own and the overall team's positivity and productivity. And who would not want more of that? Here's to BIG thinking.

Members Quarterly

Fall 2013 Edition

feature

Gail Boone is an Executive Coach and Owner of Hold Them Big and a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) with the International Coach Federation. She can be reached at gailboone@ns.sympatico.ca

Carla Hurley is an Executive Coach and Owner of Inside Out Leadership and a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) with the International Coach Federation. She can be reached at carlahurley@eastlink.ca