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Team &
Group
Coaching
in an
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World



Leader Bows Out of Team Coaching



The Situation

“I’ve been contacted by a leader to coach their team. When I asked if the leader will participate, they said no, it’s just for their team. What do I do?”

The Experts Weigh In

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

Check all the assumptions. First, check your own assumptions. Are you assuming that the leader must participate? What are you making it mean if the leader does or does not participate? Are you assigning a value judgment to whether or not they participate? Is that true?

For example, if you assume that a leader should be engaged and fully involved in

team coaching, why do you believe that? Is it bad if they do not participate? Is that true? Identify and make transparent your unconscious bias.

Next, check the assumptions of the leader. What does this leader believe to be true about team coaching? What are their biases? What does this leader believe to be true about the team itself? Is that true? How would we know?

Once you uncover these surface and hidden assumptions, you can dig to the next layer. Are you clear and aligned about the reasons for team coaching in the first place? Perhaps your client leader hired you to “fix” something they believe is broken about their team. If that’s the case, there is coaching you can provide to this leader to rehearse the management conversations that are required before team coaching can be used as an effective intervention.

What is the purpose of the team coaching? What outcome or result would the leader consider to be a win? If the leader is seeing team coaching as a way to fix a malfunction of the team, what would op-

timal functionality look like? In other words, how would the leader know if the team coaching was effective?

Once you know this intended outcome, you can discuss with the leader whether or not it makes sense for them to be part of the team coaching. Before aligning on the purpose and how you and they will know if it was achieved, you can’t actually say whether or not it would serve the client to have the leader participate or not. Nor can you say how they might participate to contribute to the team result they are hiring you to help them achieve.

It may very well be perfect and ideal to have you just coach the team without the leader. Having done it both ways, I can tell you that there are definitely situations where the best work of the team is not possible if the leader is engaged in the process, just like there are situations where the team can’t get to their best possible result without the leader’s input.

Both are true in different circumstances. Your job is to help the client sort out their truth.

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®, CEC

Leaders' actions must reflect their words. It is possible that what you see is precisely the leader's perspective: "I don't need coaching; my team does." Remembering the example of the cobbler whose children have no shoes, your work will fail if the leader isn't willing to become engaged.

As an executive coach for 19 years, what I believed as a 'greener' coach I no longer think: "When the leader sees how much their team has changed, they'll get on board!" My work has been a bust in the dozens of times I've worked at any level below the C-Suite without the C-Suite's engagement.

You may need to learn that yourself, but you're here to get some wisdom from experienced practitioners of this work we

call coaching. So, I will repeat bottom line: decline the assignment. It doesn't work to lead the leader's team without them participating. It is invalidating to the team and sends the wrong message.

No one has time for coaching unless it personally brings tremendous value to them. When I've encountered leaders who don't need coaching, I explain to them that coaching is for people who need it and those who don't need it.

Consider the employee's perspective. If the leader is not present during coaching at the team level, or present but not engaged, and unwilling to grow in awareness, your impact will be short-lived and could negatively affect the team.

Coaches can be as guilty as anyone of a scarcity mindset.

Remember: There is so much need for your services in the world. Do not consider working with clients who don't share your values. Coaching is for everyone, and when confronted with a leader who says it's for everyone except themselves, it's time to have a robust conversation with that leader.

The power you bring as the coach is to speak truth to power while saying no to mediocrity in your coaching practice, which will get you sustained growth and more significant opportunities. When a CEO sings your praises to their peers, you'll receive a genuine endorsement and grow your business because they've received value personally from you, not through the team.

Go and have that conversation, and be prepared to talk with your feet.

By Craig Carr, BCC, PCC, CPCC

You did not say why the leader said no, so I assume you haven't had that conversation yet. You need more information about what you're stepping into. The last thing you want is to be triangulated between the team and the leader – a situation that leaves you vulnerable to being scapegoated if the team fails or falls short.

With that in mind, there may be valid reasons why the leader would not be part of the team coaching. But before you say yes to the project, you must know those reasons. Beyond that, you must also be 100 percent convinced that the leader's non-participation comes with a solid base of leadership skills, self-awareness, and authentic concern for their team.

If you smell fear, grievance or arrogance, or if you hear excuses like being too busy or not having time, those are red flags. If you sense contempt or observe that members are holding back their viewpoints, those are also red flags.

So, what is a good reason for the leader to bow out? Team dynamics may be such

that members do not feel they can freely and safely explore (and resolve) issues if the leader is in the room. If that is the case, proceed with caution, but at least members will feel like they have some authority in how things go. This works best if the leader *wants in* and anticipates an invitation at a later time.

A leader declining because the team is doing technical work where their presence would slow progress can also make sense. But if there are human dynamics involved – like power struggles, role conflict, expenditure bias, etc. – then make clear to the leader that the team is seriously encumbered if they won't show up but still expect to remain in control. You won't run an effective group if there's a hidden dynamic where someone not in the conversation can

indiscriminately veto the team's work.

Deciding that the leader is not in the group must be a collaborative, two-way street. If the leader is willing to sign over authority *carte blanche*, the path is cleared for potentially good work. That also means that the coaching must tread carefully if the team diverges from a technical project focus to human dynamics involving conflict or personality styles, which would require input from the leader.

If you are a coach who likes to stay in a technical zone with clients, it is good to know that about yourself and stay in that lane. Most coaches, though, will be drawn to the gritty mess of human interactions because it can be turned into gold. To be effective at that, you need all the players who count to be in the room. ●

Are you grappling with a sticky situation?

You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situation to submissions@choice-online.com and put "sticky situations" in the subject line.