THE POWER OF COACHING AS A LEADERSHIP STYLE
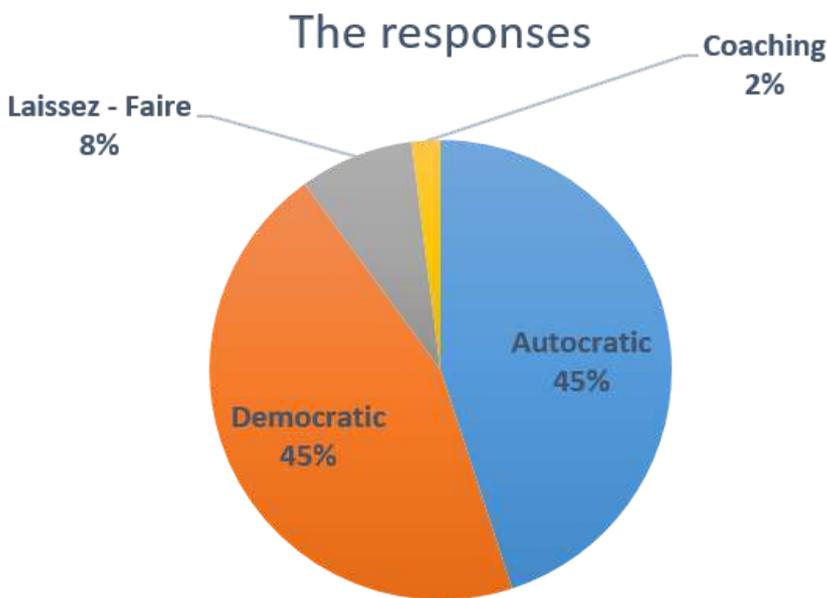
WHY THIS ARTICLE?

The trigger for this article is a poll that we conducted with 60 professionals over a webinar on "The Power of Coaching as a Leadership Style".

The question: What predominant Leadership style have you observed in managers around you?
The options:
1) Autocratic 2) Democratic 3) Laissez-faire and 4) Coaching

The responses

- From 60 respondents only 2% have experienced that Coaching is used as a common leadership style

- 45% of the respondents said that the Autocratic style of leadership is commonly used at the workplace

While we appreciated the authenticity of the answers, it made us sad too, to see that Coaching as a leadership style was used only 2% of the time.

It is important to speak about Coaching as a leadership style, and this is why:

- We truly believe that the Coaching style of Leadership gets results
- In the present situation, where things are fluid, low energy, and uncertain and we talk about coaching as a leadership style to senior leaders, what we hear is: "In this difficult time coaching may not work, we need to tell them what to do". And we believe Coaching will work even better at this time.

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Based on our years of work with leaders, both from being inside and from outside organizations, we realized that the challenges were at two levels (as shown in the graph):

- Leaders coach much less than they can. Leaders do not believe coaching works as a leadership style. It is a 'good-to-have' style, it is "soft" and does not always get the job done. We see it more as a will issue than a skill issue. The pushback comes in many ways-

o "My team is not ready yet"
o "This is a difficult time"
o "They are not mature enough"

The core issue is, a leader operates from a mindset of:

o "I have to tell"
o "I have to solve"
o "I have to control"

It is a very "I" centric approach and comes with a high dose of fear of failure. Many of these leaders have been leading the same team for some time and yet they distrust their team's capability and potential. Therefore the point to think through- all these years whatever you were doing with your team surely did not help them mature!

➢ Those who adopt (or think they adopt) the Coaching style of Leadership have an inflated view of their coaching effectiveness. A study conducted in a Fortune 500 company that has a large sales team shows that while the leaders believe their coaching ability to be at 79th. percentile, their team rates them at 38th. percentile for the same. (1)

Let us first break the myth, that coaching does not work. Using coaching as a leadership conversation style in the organization goes a long way in making the workplace more human, open, and psychologically safe. But how does it help in the organization's performance?
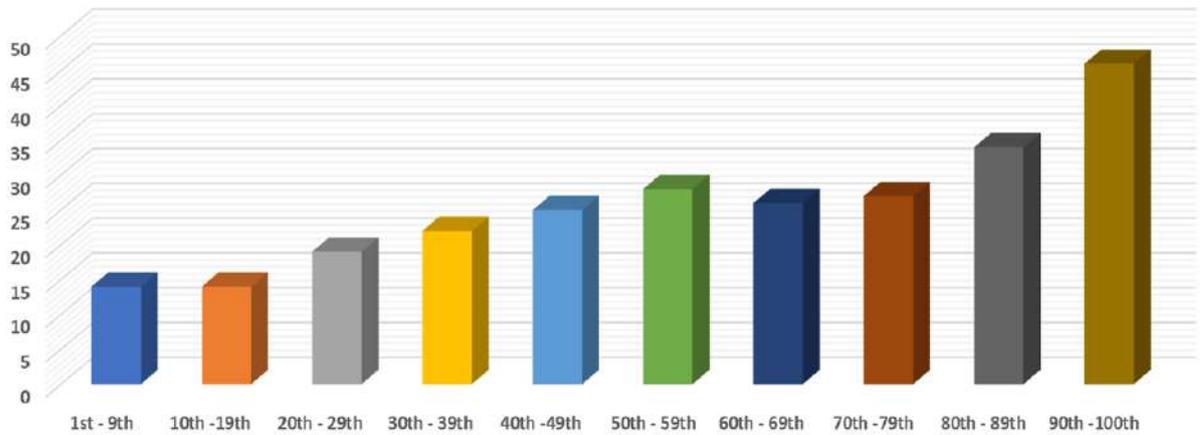
➢ We ran a performance coaching skill-building initiative for people managers in a multibillion-dollar organization. The initiative resulted in the engagement score for people managers to improve significantly.

➢ In 2015, Forbes Magazine (2) reported a study, where it was found that employees were not only more productive but also more engaged as a result of good coaching. Leaders in the 90th percentile for coaching effectiveness had employee commitment scores in the 88th percentile. But leaders in the 10th percentile for coaching had employees at the 15th percentile for commitment. Correlation is not always causality, but the evidence is compelling.
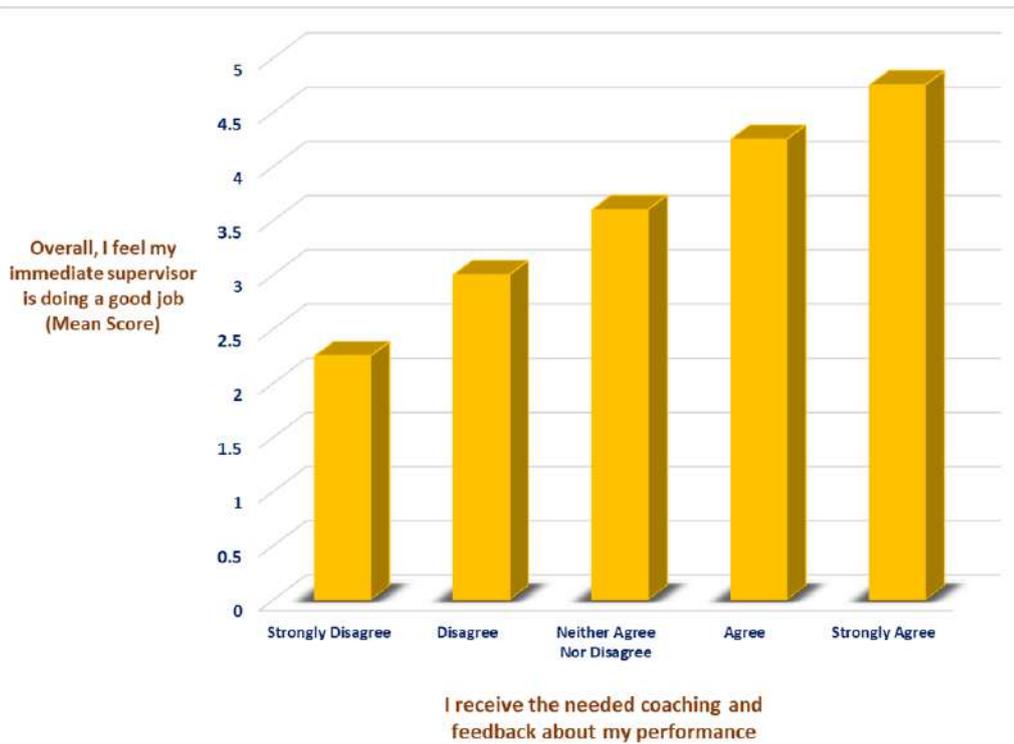
➢ More than 60% of employees who report to managers who are not good coaches think of quitting, versus 22% who report to managers who are effective at coaching.

Approximately three in five (61%) organizations with a strong coaching culture are also classified as high performing organizations.

COACHING EFFECTIVENESS PERCENTILE

% OF EMPLOYEES WILLING TO "GO THE EXTRA MILE"

1st - 9th | 10th -19th | 20th - 29th | 30th - 39th | 40th -49th | 50th - 59th | 60th - 69th | 70th -79th | 80th - 89th | 90th -100th

Overall, I feel my immediate supervisor is doing a good job (Mean Score)

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree

I receive the needed coaching and feedback about my performance

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# NOW, TO THE SECOND QUESTION- WHY DOES COACHING WORK?

THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE:

o It is a long game that helps in building people's capability, which in turn impacts performance. Coaching works with the belief that "People have potential" and your role as a leader is to unlock it.

o The competition for coaching is advising. In our experience, advise, is more than a little overrated. Each one of us works differently. It is like food habits. While food solves the problem of hunger, each person approaches it differently, and therefore the advise that is effective for one person, may not work for others.

o As coaching builds people capability, it frees up time for the leader to focus on their work

o Coaching is inclusive as it involves conversation, listening, trust; it creates a nourishing environment. In the present context where people are anxious, unsure, and looking for support, it will work even better.

Let us also have a working definition for Coaching- Whitmore wrote –"Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximize their performance". But how? With a series of conversations. Coaching conversation influences the coachee's understanding, Learning, Behavior, and Progress.

Before getting into simple steps of coaching, it is important to understand the mindset of a Coach, without which, it will never work because a skill without a will behind it rarely gives results.

The key 'being' (persona) of a coach is-
o **Trusting**- Trust that the team member has potential and your role is to support her progress
o **Curious**- Ability to ask a question from a beginner's mindset
o **Patient**- To be comfortable and even encourage and deal with occasional failures. Have the patience to   listen without judgment.
o **Aware**- Personal bias of how things 'should' be done
o **Open**- To explore with and observe a team member doing something in a different way

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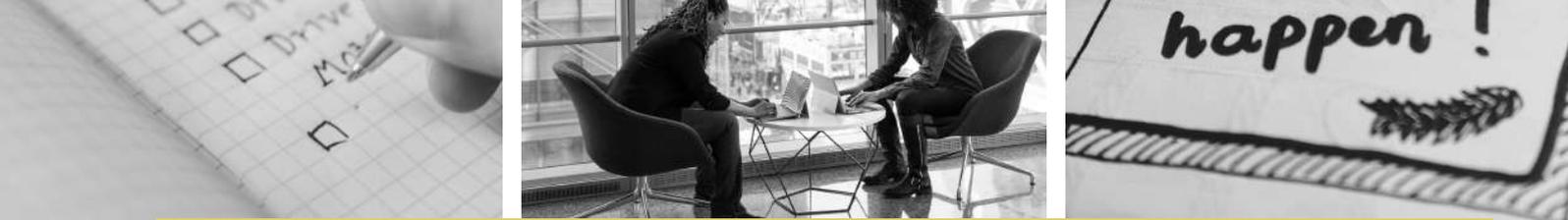
STEPS OF COACHING

There are many coaching frameworks, and all of them work. Here is a simple one

GOAL SETTING

➤ **Agree on:**
o What does the result look like?
o What is the impact we will see?
o What makes it important?
o What is the real problem we are trying to solve? Often the way a problem gets presented and the real problem is different. If a team member is failing to present effectively, it may be a communication issue of how to present or it may be because she gets nervous or it may be an issue of planning or practice.

DISCUSSION

➤ **Listen to the content, intent, and even what is not said.**
o Listen to understand
o Ask to get clarity
o Explore possibilities
o Remain curious and be aware of your bias
In case you are compelled to give a suggestion, give it as one of the options and not the only solution

ACTION PLANNING

➤ **Agree on:**
o What is your team member committing to?
o What would be your role?
o How would you review it?
o What can come in the way, and how would you manage it?

To summarize –
1) Understand the real challenge
2) Ask and Listen to understand the situation and possible options to approach it
3) Support the coachee to create an action plan.

Here is how to make a good beginning by stopping a few unhelpful behaviors.
➤ Stop giving advice. It is overrated.
➤ Stop telling your stories "Let me tell you what I did…"
➤ Stop believing you have all the answers

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WISH YOU ALL THE BEST IN YOUR JOURNEY OF BECOMING A GREAT COACHING LEADER.

Some interesting material to read and listen to -
1. Tao of Coaching by Max Landsberg
2. Inner Game of Tennis- Timothy Gallwey
3. The Advice Trap- Michael Bungay Stanier
4. https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/coaching-techniques-tips-for-leaders

References -
1. Sales Teams Need More (and Better) Coaching by Scott Edinger, HBR, May 2015
2. Five Business Payoffs for being an effective Coach by Joseph Folkman, Forbes Magazine
3. Building a Coaching Culture for Change Management- ICF & HCI, September 2018.

URVASHI MALHOTRA

urvashi@reflexionspace.com

SUVA CHATTOPADHYAY

suva@reflexionspace.com

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