

The Importance of Seeking Feedback When Self-Coaching



Finding others to provide valuable feedback can help people identify their blind spots getting in the way of their professional development.

**By Susan Kushnir, Talent Economy Coaching Columnist
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Ever see someone oblivious to the fact that they have a small piece of broccoli between their teeth? The broccoli is noticeable to everyone but the person with the embedded broccoli. It is truly a blind spot.

The ability to coach ourselves requires us to develop ways to continually get feedback from those we trust and admire so that we can remove such blind spots.

The coaching industry is continuing to evolve and the employee's role in coaching is morphing. In the past, many employees would receive one-on-one coaching, even employees that were on the verge of being let go from the company. Later, it became more common for high-potential senior executives to have one-on-one coaching. And now, the value of coaching is even more

evident; it is becoming critical for every employee, regardless of hierarchy or performance, to find ways to be their own coach.

"If you think about it, the ability to become your own coach is now a mandate for each of us," said Wendy Wollner, president and CEO of Balancing Life's Issues Inc., a corporate training firm based in Ossining, New York. "Otherwise, we would minimally need at least five coaches at all times to help us with health, finance, work, family and developing our legacy. That's not possible."

Stratford Sherman, who is listed among the 50 top coaches in the U.S. by Howard Morgan, Phil Harkins and Marshal Goldsmith, authors of "The Art and Practice of Leadership Coaching: 50 Top Executive Coaches Reveal Their Secrets," agrees. "If you eliminate the word 'coaching,' you are really talking about self-development, which is something everyone needs to do."

What's at the heart of self-coaching? Simply, the ability to ask the right questions and continually getting feedback from others on issues that undermine our effectiveness. One way to get feedback is by creating your own circle of allies or advisors.

Create a Circle of Allies

Identify a core group of individuals that can point out the "broccoli between your teeth," or things that get in the way of our effectiveness that we can't see. Identify people whose strengths may be your weakness. These allies can be from work, your community, younger, older, clergy or even mentors that you admire from afar.

"I believe the diagnosis is the hardest part," said Lori Trahan, chief executive officer at Concire Leadership Institute, a learning and advisory firm. "Ask people that you trust, 'Is there something I can do that will improve the influence I have with others?'" Then test their suggestions or 'prescriptions.' Be ready to pivot if something you're doing is not working." Try their suggestions. If it a suggestion you try doesn't work, pivot — quickly.

As Frances Frei, a senior associate dean for executive education for Executive Education and the UPS Foundation Professor of Service Management at the Harvard Business School said, "Don't be too quick to pour liquid cement on something." If one suggestion doesn't work, try something else.

The Art of Receiving Feedback

During a visit to Airbnb, Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook, was asked by an audience member about the most important thing she looks for when identifying someone that can scale a company. Her

response: "Someone who takes feedback well. Because people who can take feedback well are people who can learn and grow quickly."

The ability to receive feedback is one the most important muscles a coachee should develop. Giving feedback is very important too, but the ability to receive feedback is an underrated skill.

Sometimes getting feedback stings. Lori Trahan, chief executive officer at Concire Leadership Institute, has found a way to take the sting out of giving and receiving feedback. Take the burden off of the person you're soliciting feedback by asking, "How would you have handled that situation?" They will be able to talk openly about what they would have done rather than offering a critique of what you did.

Lori added: "Sometimes we ask for feedback from people we haven't vetted — meaning we're not sure if their strengths match our weaknesses. Ensure you are asking for feedback from someone whose behavior you want to emulate. Then, create a safe environment for him/her to share information."

People tend to struggle with receiving feedback. The receiver is in charge and decides what to let in. Maybe the key is to learn how to internalize the blizzard of feedback. People who solicit feedback are likely to report higher work satisfaction, adapt more quickly to new roles and get higher performance reviews. "This suggests that if you get better at handling everybody's feedback to you, it doesn't just change you, it changes how other people see and experience you," said Sheila Henn, founder of Triad Consulting Group, in a [TED talk](#).

Now that you identified your circle of allies and developed strategy for accepting a feedback, you need to find role models to emulate.

Everyone is a Role Model

Role models can come from unlikely places. It sounds silly, but many cartoons, if you look closely enough, have valuable lessons. Think about the Scooby Gang, for instance, from the popular children's cartoon "Scooby Doo." This gang of humans and one huge dog always seem to be in the midst of some wild situation. Most of the episode involves slapstick chase scenes but, in the end, the villain is typically not who everyone thinks it is. The lesson: Things often aren't what they first appear to be.

Consider Harold, our bald-headed friend from "Harold and the Purple Crayon." Harold uses his crayon to color whatever he needs. If he wants to take a moonlit walk and it is dark, he colors a path and a glowing moon. If he wants to take a balloon ride, he draws a balloon and an easy escape after. This guy is the

definition of resourcefulness and resilience. The lesson here is if you need something, find a way to create it.

Television shows also provide valuable self-coaching lessons.

Recently "Grey's Anatomy," the television drama that takes place in a hospital, Diane Pierce, the mother of cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Maggie Pierce, was introduced. Diane offered some words of wisdom in an episode that resonated with me:

"I always taught my daughter, if she wanted to know something, don't ask the internet. Find the smartest person in the room, and if they're not smarter than you...find another room."

That's good advice for everyone. The lesson here is to always seek people to learn from.

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