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Team & Group Coaching

**Trends, Techniques,
Distinctions &
Success Factors**



Why Groups?

Trends in Team Coaching

Targeted Approaches



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Team Coaching in Pairs

The challenge and art of the two-coach dance

True story: My colleague and I were working with a senior management team from a well-known technology company. We were in the afternoon of day one of a two-day session. The team was engaged in important conversation about low team scores for Trust and Accountability – except for two team members who were clearly not taking this seriously. In fact they were creating a distraction – at least in my mind – a distraction that was undermining the team’s effort.

I could feel myself losing patience and I had already zeroed in on one of the two main troublemakers. My tone was getting sharper. I was hooked. This team member’s behavior was at the root of a lack of responsibility that infected the team, in my judgment. Fortunately, my colleague, my co-coach, had the clear presence of mind to see this as an issue for the team as a whole, not just about one or two team members’ actions. She picked up on the theme of the question I asked about responsibility and took it to the team. It was deftly done and re-

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engaged the team in the topic. There was relief in the air. On the break we talked about it and my appreciation for her intervention.

This experience illustrates one of the key benefits of team coaching in pairs: a lifeline when one of the coaches is lost.

Teams are complex, multi-dimensional, often chaotic, periodically emotional and constantly shifting. Coaching teams is enormously gratifying and an exhilarating



ride, and when team size gets above about 10 or 12 team members, there are tremendous advantages to two coaches working side by side.

The Value of Co-coaching

Co-coaching has some obvious benefits, and some that are less obvious. With co-coaches you have two sets of ears and two sets of eyes. You each respond differently, see different things, you track the process differently. The team benefits from the range available with two coaches. The coaches benefit by leaning into each other. Co-coaching is more than the sum of the individual parts.

At its best co-coaching is a 200 percent effort – 100 percent from each partner, not 50-50. It is a total commitment by both coaches to the team first and foremost, and to the partnership. This is more than simply trading off: first me, then you. It is a seamless effort that maximizes the strengths of each partner for the benefit of the team.

It is also different than co-leading a training course together. In the training environment you and your partner have the agenda; you have content to deliver. In a coaching model, the client has the agenda, and in this case the

client is the team. The outcome is a stronger, more effective team. That is the team's agenda. Your plan for the coaching session is a useful exercise that you may need to abandon in the face of what the team needs in the moment. In fact, the joke is, "What do team coaches do at lunch? Re-design the afternoon."

Another key benefit of co-coaching is the example you give the team. You are a model of a great team in action. You show mutual trust and respect, effective communication, the value of diverse styles, accountability to the work with the team, and much more.

Creating a Successful Partnership

An effective co-coaching partnership starts with an open, honest conversation, and a commitment to show up 100 percent. In this initial partnership design conversation, there are a number of key topics you both address:

- Where I am strong (in style, in experience, in content)
- Where I get trapped. We all get trapped. Where is your default place?
- What I need from you in our partnership, especially what I need from you when I am trapped
- What you can count on from me in our partnership.

In addition:

Take a look at the assumptions you have about each other, about the partnership and about the team. This is an opportunity to surface underlying assumptions and check them out. Unexpressed assumptions have a way of tripping us up in the dance.

Have agreements around giving

and receiving feedback. We all want to improve as team coaches. At least that's my assumption. The best insight will come from a professional, trained colleague. We all know that, and yet sometimes feedback is awkward. Be specific about what you want for feedback, and come to an agreement on the best timing for feedback.

Some partnerships discuss and agree on signals they give one another. A gentle, unobtrusive word or phrase, or a touch on the arm can be a simple way to remind your co-coach of an agreement. If one of the coaches knows, and discloses that he or she has a tendency to slip into teacher/ professor mode – and it can create a very analytical and sometimes sleepy effect on the team, they might work out a signal for that situation. It could be a sentence like, "Obviously, my partner is very passionate about the subject ..."

The Co-coaching Dance

The design of the relationship is your rehearsal. The dance really begins when the lights are on the team. The goal is to blend together in one seamless effort with both of you having your attention on the team – not on each other. You learn to sense one another, and anticipate where the co-coaching is going next. And it won't always be smooth, sometimes because you stumble over each other and sometimes by design. Sometimes "smooth" is not what the team needs, and giving the team what it needs is the job of the coaches.

There are fundamentally two dance steps for co-coaching. In the first, the emphasis is on blending and flowing together. For example, one

of the coaches has started a line of conversation with the team. Coach #2 can see where the conversation is headed and blends into the flow so that Coach #1 has the lead, but maintains the direction of the coach-

“Co-coaching is more than the sum of the individual parts.”

ing. This is also where that second set of eyes and ears is handy. While Coach #1 is engaged with the conversation, Coach #2 is scanning the reaction of the whole team, sensing the reception, in order to reinforce that course or change course.

Dance step two is designed to change direction – sometimes suddenly and sometimes subtly. In this scenario, Coach #1 has the lead in a line of conversation with the team. Coach #2 can see there is a better direction that will serve the team, and intervenes to take the new direction. Coach #1 recognizes the new direction and gives control to #2. In this scenario Coach #1 may not see exactly where the new line of conversation is headed but trusts his/her co-coach to have that vision.

Remember, this is all in service of the team. In the best examples of co-coaching there will be almost no awareness of who is leading from the coaches' chairs. And in the end, the role of the coach will be largely invisible because the team is so focused on the rich, productive conversation that takes place. ●