



Book review

The coaching Manager

Hunt J.M. and Weintraub J.R. (2002), SAGE pubs, Thousand Oaks London, New Delhi 2002

Review by Seamus Barry *

Hunt and Weintraub, the two authors of this book are management professors at Babson College in Wellesby, Massachusetts US, a business school well known in the area of entrepreneurship.

Although the specific focus of this book is on the work of the coaching manager and how s/he helps employees learn and develop in their working roles, the fourteen chapters of this book offer a wealth of information by means of real-world case studies (20 in total), action checklists and self assessment criteria to provide the reader with “some ‘new and improved’ says the coach” (p.240). The authors state in the acknowledgements that: “The Babson College Coaching for Leadership and Teamwork Program (www.babson.edu/coach) has provided an ongoing laboratory in which we have been able to deepen our understanding of helping, coaching and learning from experience. More than 2000 Babson alumni and MBA students have participated in the coaching program since its inception and we wish to thank them all”.

Unfortunately space and time will not permit me to work systematically in depth through the 14 chapters of this book, but instead I will highlight key areas of the text which I feel are beneficial for the coaching practitioner.

In Chapter 1, the authors outline their ideas about “developmental coaching”, principally as a means of promoting experiential learning. They write: “We define developmental coaching as an interaction between two people usually a manager and an employee aimed at helping the employee to learn from the job in order to promote their development. Learning is primary, though of course, learning usually leads to improved performance” (p.5). The authors challenge us about our existing mental models of coaching by asking this pertinent question: “Did the best coaches push for compliance, or did they push for growth and learning?” (p.13).

In Chapter 2 they give us an overview of their Development Coaching Model. This model has essentially eight elements including the following:

- a. a coaching friendly context
- b. a coaching mind set on the part of the manager

- c. a coach-able learner
- d. a coaching dialogue (which includes opportunities for learning, encouraging reflection on actions, questioning, owning and defining roles and learning needs)
- e. the coaching mirror (defining what's important to observe and observing effectively – which can be surprisingly difficult to do)
- f. providing balance and helpful feedback
- g. coach and coachee work together to understand what needs changing
- h. coach and coachee set a goal for change and follow up.

The authors contend that “the model is simple conceptually and does not take a great deal of time to execute once you have established a coaching friendly context”

Chapter 3, 4 and 5 respectively deal with the first three elements of the model, whereas chapters 6 to 11 inclusively deal with the remaining elements of the model. These chapters may be considered the heart of the book as they describe the coaching model in detail. I found chapter 8 (observing what is important, effectively) and chapter 9 (providing balanced and helpful feedback) to be especially helpful and I concur fully with the authors when they note: “the art of coaching, an art one learns only with practice, is in knowing how to offer feedback in a way that conveys as much useful information as possible” (p.145).

Chapters 12 to 14 respectively focus on some applications of the coaching model i.e., career development, performance problems and transfer of learning (from the classroom to the workplace). These areas are treated in a very open and transparent manner, with humanity, dignity, tact, sensibility and mutual respect for all the parties concerned.

Overall I found this book very rewarding to read. It is well written and well structured with the learning objectives clearly set out for each chapter. There is an excellent integration of theory and practice throughout the book enhanced by a lively pace and writing style. I consider this book to be an indispensable asset for every busy coaching practitioner and for anyone participating in training programs, especially in leadership, teamwork and organizational development.

Again, I agree fully with the authors when they write: “Coaching is not a conceptually complex task. It is a complex task in execution” (p.239). This book provides a key to unlock this complex task in execution.

Published in

ID:EAS Vol.21 - October 2003

ASCCANZ E-News Vol 4, February 2004

www.asccanz.org

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