

Discover: Coaching!



Coaching Defined

By Tony Stoltzfus

Coaching has enough of a buzz surrounding it that it seems to be cropping up all over the place in today's church. While that's exciting news, it also means that people are being called "coaches" when they aren't even sure what coaching really is. How exactly do you define "coaching", how do you distinguish it from mentoring or consulting, and how do you get those differences across to the people around you who want to know what a coach is?

Working Definitions

First, it helps to have a good working definition of coaching. I often say, "Coaching is the discipline of helping people grow without telling them what to do." That definition distinguishes coaching from the "telling" mode we all so easily fall into. Another way to define coaching is to reference the image of a personal trainer. "Pro athletes have a personal trainer to help them maximize their athletic performance. Having a coach is like having a personal trainer for every area of your life." This is an effective picture of the benefits of coaching.

It also helps to contrast coaching with other disciplines. For instance, "Mentoring is imparting to *you* what is inside *me*. Coaching is drawing out of *you* what is inside *you*." This definition juxtaposes the impartation from mentor to mentoree that characterizes mentoring with coaching's thrust of encouraging a person to make their own choices and solve their own problems.

The Parenting Analogy

A good way to begin to grasp coaching is to connect it with things that are already familiar—like parenting. With infants, we take responsibility for their lives and do things for them—feed them, clothe them, change their diapers. As they move toward school age, we shift to more of a directing mode, where we tell them what to do ("Time to go to bed, Johnnie!") and expect them to do it. As children grow toward their teenage years, we shift again toward a mentoring posture, where we impart wisdom to them and expect them to apply those principles to guide their choices about money, friends, their time, ethics, etc.

Finally, in their teen and early adult years, parents must begin moving into a coaching mode. At this point, we want our children to begin functioning like adults and taking responsibility for their own lives. If we are wise, we stop telling them what to do (since they don't want to hear our advice any way!), and identify the places where we can help them find their own answers. If we keep telling too long, our children rebel against being controlled and set out to form their individual identities on their own, without any help from us. Most parents with teenage or adult children can immediately grasp the rationale for taking this coaching approach. Treating others like adults by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own lives is one of the things that makes coaching a great method for working with leaders.

Demonstration

Here's a final tip: it is very difficult to grasp what coaching really is without seeing it demonstrated. We learn new concepts by associating them with things we've already seen and know. If you have never

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seen great coaching in practice, someone can tell you what it is, but you have no accurate images to associate with those words. Without an experience of coaching, when we hear coaching explained we are associating it with images of mentoring, consulting, or counseling (or even a Junior High football coach!)

So if you want a true idea of what this coaching thing is all about, ask for a free complimentary session and have the coach actually coach you on a real issue for 10 or 15 minutes. You may be amazed at the progress you can make in such a short time!