

# Discover: Coaching!



## The Coaching Approach to Growth

by Tony Stoltzfus

A while back I was agonizing over how to fund a new service venture. Do I raise money, and spend the added time to form a board and do books for a non-profit? Do I enlist investors and give up ownership in the organization? Or do I take out a personal loan and run it as a business? Several self-imposed deadlines had come and gone, and I still couldn't pull the trigger.

Finally I sat down with a friend of mine who's a coach and a successful businessman, and asked for help. I laid out my conundrum in detail, going through the pluses and minuses of each option, as well as my difficulties in choosing between them, and then I asked for his sage advice. "What do *you* think I should do?"

My friend thought for a moment or two, and then responded in a coaching mode: "I think you know in your heart what the answer is. You just need to follow your heart."

At first his response frustrated me. I wanted some answers! I wanted him to tell me what to do! So I steered the conversation back around and five minutes later I posed the same question in a different way. My friend again thought for a moment—and then gave me an identical reply!

When we said goodbye, I was frustrated to not have an answer, but as I walked back to my car I also felt strangely empowered to face my decision and make a choice. On the way home, this I had a powerful experience of hearing the inner voice: "*If you don't have the confidence to invest in yourself, you'll never achieve what you are capable of.*" My heart really was speaking to me!

When I talked it over with my wife, I found that she had come to a new clarity that same day, so we were able to make a great decision together on how to move forward.

In situations like this, it's easy to ask for advice, and to give the "right answer" when we are asked. So why take the time to help people figure out their own solutions when it is so much quicker to tell them what to do? It always seems to take longer to help people think things through than it does to do the thinking for them. So what's the benefit of taking a coaching approach and asking instead of telling?

The story recounted above is a great example of the power of coaching. Here are six things my friend accomplished by asking that never would have come from giving advice:

- **Empowerment.** By *not* telling me what to do, he sent a powerful message: "I believe in you! I believe you know what to do. You can make a great choice." His belief in me gave me the confidence I needed to make a decisive choice.
- **Ownership.** Because I made the decision, I owned it. It was my choice. If he had told me what to do and it didn't work out, then whose fault would it be?
- **Motivation.** When people come up with their own ideas and solutions, they are most motivated to pursue them. The pivotal factor in change isn't knowing what to do; it's having the motivation to get it done. The coaching approach produced the highest possible motivation in me to move forward—in fact, within 24 hours I had already acted on something I'd put off for months.

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- **Leadership Development.** The greatest impact of that decision was not what I did with my business: it was that in the process I saw very clearly the impact of my inability to see myself for who I really was. That decision was a great turning point for me in having the audacity to pursue my dreams. By pushing me to take responsibility instead of depending on him, my coach helped me grow as a leader.
- **Growth in Decision-Making Ability.** I was challenged me to listen to my own heart instead of following the people around me. This approach didn't just result in one great decision: by strengthening my confidence and decision-making ability, it impacted every decision I'll make for the rest of my life.
- **You Could Be Wrong.** I was considering three options: that means any advice I was given would have had a two-out-of-three chance of being wrong. You won't realize how often your "right answers" for others are wrong until you stop giving advice and start waiting to see what others are truly capable of.

*Adapted from The Peer Coach Training Workbook by Tony Stoltzfus*