

FROM THE LEADER SERVICES OFFICER

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What is the most important element in the Coach/Coachee relationship?

As 'coaching' becomes more widespread across Education Queensland more and more school leaders are entering into formal coaching arrangements. This may be an internal school arrangement, or alternatively, where a principal is coaching a colleague from another school as part of a regional program. In some other cases an external consultant may be engaged to coach a principal. Such arrangements where the coachee is part of a program that is sponsored by a supervisor (perhaps the principal for an internal arrangement or a senior officer for a regional program) the most important element in the Coach/Coachee relationship becomes even more critical.

Stephen M.R. Covey in *The Speed of Trust* asserts that there is something that is common to every individual, relationship, team, family, organisation, nation, economy and civilisation throughout the world – one thing which if removed, will destroy the most powerful government, the most influential leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love. On the other hand, if developed and leveraged, that something has the potential to create unparalleled success and prosperity in every dimension of life.

That something is trust.

We know, do we not, that to engage in a truly honest conversation with another we need to unquestionably believe that we can extend unqualified trust to them? The difficulty with a nominalisation like 'trust' is that it is easy to feel but can be a slippery concept to tangibly define and even more difficult to identify the specific behaviours which will build or destroy trust in a relationship.

This article postulates that trust is the foundational element to a successful coaching relationship and provides an invitation to coaches to consider Covey's definition of trust as a tangible way to both define trust and embed behaviours to establish trust with a client.

The foundation of trust in the coaching relationship is that the coachee has a rock solid belief that the conversation is totally and completely confidential.

The only exception is where a client shares information of criminal activity or behaviours clearly in breach of the code of conduct of the sponsoring organisation. The difference between confidentiality and collusion must be made clear to your client.

With the exception of the above, as coach it is your responsibility to ensure that there is a common understanding with both the coachee and the sponsor that the coachee owns the conversation. The coachee is free to share details of any conversation with whomever they wish however the coach will in no circumstances do so. In particular the sponsor shall not directly, or indirectly, seek to draw that detail from either coach or coachee.

The sponsor has the right to:

- Establish expectations about practical components of the coaching arrangement.
- Set organisational goals and targets for the coachee.
- Have reports on practical aspects such as dates and length of formal coaching sessions.
- Aggregate data on the type (email, telephone, etc.) and extent of additional support provided to the coachee.
- Request a summative evaluation from the coachee in regard to the value of the coaching experience.
- Other organisational aspects as may be negotiated prior to the commencement of the coaching engagement.

Having set a clear and shared platform of confidentiality, the coach holds carriage of establishing and consolidating trust with the coachee.

So what is this slippery concept of trust?

Covey suggests that if we want to establish trust with another we firstly have to trust ourselves. We need to be the example of what we want to establish.

We both trust ourselves, and inspire trust in ourselves with others, when we show both character and competence. Character includes your integrity, your motive, and your intent with people. Competence includes your capabilities, your skills, your results, your track record. And both are vital.

Being a 'good' person is not enough to establish trust. A client needs to believe that we are competent as well as of impeccable character. We show our competence by demonstrating the highest level of professionalism in our preparation, execution and follow through with a coaching session. Nothing succeeds like success and as a client sees results we establish our track record with them.

Covey concludes that trust is one of the most powerful forms of motivation and inspiration. People want to be trusted. They respond to trust. They thrive on trust. Whatever our situation, we need to get good at establishing, extending, and restoring trust – not as a manipulative technique, but as the most effective way of relating to and working with others, and the most effective way of getting results.

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