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# Coaching as a Development Tool

## Insights and Perspectives from Practitioners

# I Don't Need a Coach

## About the Author



Gagan Adlakha

Gagan Adlakha, Senior Partner at Vyaktitva, is a Life / Executive Coach and an specialist in the area of people performance. An XLRI 1990 alumnus, Gagan joined the IT sector in its high growth phase and handled a variety of roles covering the complete gamut of HR functions for over 10 years. He rounded off his corporate experience by handling business roles for the next 4 years.

Gagan turned entrepreneur in 2004 and joined Vyaktitva as a partner with the desire to help enhance people performance across organisations. Gagan has been working on various Coaching, Organizational Design and Learning & Development assignments focused on individual and organizational performance. He has designed and delivered solutions for premier organizations including the Max group, PepsiCo, Amex, Unilever, Colgate, Airtel, Genpact, Hewitt, Whirlpool, Accenture, GE, ITC, Hero, RB, Mother Dairy, Ericsson and IBM.

The article presented by Gagan is based on the constructs of 'Get Real coaching model' of Vyaktitva.

## I Don't Need a Coach

I am not sure if I need a coach” said Kabir as we sat down once the HR head left after introducing us. “I am a self-made man and have reached this position by the dint of my own strengths and hard work. If I had a problem, I wouldn't have been in this role.

I smiled at the advent of a fairly common notion of coaching and said, “What makes you think you have problems? I am not here to fix a ‘problem’. A coach's job is to help you be more successful and joyful. Else why would Federer, Tendulkar and Woods have coaches even at the peak of their careers?”

Kabir smiled as he settled further into the sofa and asked “So what can I expect from this engagement? And what does my company want you to do?”

“You are my primary customer, Kabir. Everything will be keeping your interest in mind and in confidence. However, you are a new CEO and the organization, obviously, has high hopes and expectations from you. My job is to accelerate your learning and make you successful much faster. They want to make every effort and investment to make you successful. Obviously, being a CEO, your actions will also have a huge impact on the other leaders around you and thus affecting the organization's performance and culture. Your success will be organization's success.”

Kabir reported “Sure that makes sense. But what's to change? Things have been going well and I have been told to focus on my strengths”

I smiled and explained, “Of course you have many strengths. That's why you are a stellar performer. But to say that you need to keep looking at them to become better defies logic. It reminds me of the Mullah Nasaruddin story where he is searching for his lost ring under a street light because it's an easier place to search rather than the dark alley where he'd lost it. Working on strengths is a no brainer, something that you already do very well. However the real opportunities, the biggest levers to be more successful, the real treasures, lie in the shadows.”

“Hmmm” he reflected. “How will you do that? Isn't that up to me? You are not even from this industry.” said Kabir, still apprehensive.

I explained “You know your trade better than most Kabir, but you also know that being a leader is not a functional or an industry skill, it's a life skill. As they say, what got you here will not get you where you want to be. You'll need to continue doing many things but also drop some and pick up new ones. I am here to help you do that as quickly and with least pain. In all aspects of your life”

“But this is a professional engagement' he said.

“Leadership is neither just an aspect of your life nor is it a mask you wear. Great leaders are great people from the inside. The focus will be on you as a person in all aspects of your life. You cannot slice and separate different parts of your life. You may play many roles on the outside but in each role, the inside is the same. Leadership is an inside out job.”

“How does that work? Explain that more, please” Kabir requested.

I continued, “Where we are today is a mix of what life threw at us and what we made of it. Everyday we are required to make choices, some are big ones like what profession we are in, who we marry, how well we manage our finances, or where we work and live; most are smaller but not necessarily less impactful, such as our lifestyle choices: what and how much we eat/drink/smoke, how much we exercise, what we spend time on, who we hang out with. Even an act of making your to-do list or calendaring is nothing but choosing what to give time and attention to. Where you are today in the journey of life is a summation of all the choices you made enroute. You made the choices and the choices made you! And the choices you make in the future will create your consequent future.

The moot question is that how many of these actions are our conscious choices? If we were to use the analogy

of the iceberg where only 10% above the waterline is visible and not the remaining 90%, human actions are the visible 10%. However, the 90% causing those actions are hidden in our sub-conscious and the unconscious mind. These shadows are where our limiting patterns lie. Identifying them and reworking them can hurl us into a very different future. My job is to make you more aware of yourself and what's not visible."

"This looks like a lot of work. What do you expect from me and do you think people really change?" asked pensive Kabir.

"Yes meaningful change is not easy. The deeper you go into the iceberg, the tougher it gets, but that's where you need to go to identify the right things to change and make the change sustainable. If the coaching/learning effort is shallow, it will be short-lived, much like a New Year resolution or a post-training action plan. You cannot change by remaining in your comfort zone. You need to be ready to get uncomfortable along with complete ownership and relentless everyday effort."

"What will your role be and what process will we use?" asked Kabir.

"Let's work with an example. Can you tell me one area where you think you might have an opportunity to become better? Something people have mentioned in your reviews and feedback." I enquired.

Kabir thought for a while and said, "I think I could be more people-oriented. Be more sensitive to them and understand them better."

"Thanks, that's good. Let's work with it." I said acknowledging his opening up.

"I will be your navigator as you go on this transformational journey. We will use the Vyaktitva's Get Real Coaching model and start by identifying and interpreting the patterns in your life. And in this case, we will validate your feeling the need to be more people-oriented. Where all does it play up, where are you less of it and where more, what are the repercussions etc. Get to know the pattern really well. Post that we will identify how this may be holding you back from becoming better or meeting your aspirations and that this is indeed what you need to work on. At this point you'd need to take a serious look at your return-on-effort before making a commitment to work on it because it will need work."

Once we start on your people orientation, the work will be at both psychological and physiological levels. This will be a longish phase where you will iteratively reflect on your actions and act on the reflections. We call it 'Refl-action'.

Each of our sessions will be based on your current reality and understanding your actions or inactions which helped create it and how they were apt or could have been different. In your example it could be meetings you attend, your one-on-one interactions, your reviews, taking task vs people decisions etc.

Going deeper we will identify the beliefs and fears in your sub-conscious, which are causing these actions. Here the beliefs could be that achieving results are paramount, data and logic are more important than emotions, success is meeting your targets which are normally numbers etc. and your fears could be fear of failure or the fear of people not accepting you or humiliation.

The Refl-action phase will help re-script these beliefs and help you manage your deep down fears. You may start realizing the excessive task orientation may give short-term gains whereas a good balance builds the team and the organization. You may recognize the role of emotions and how empathy can be a huge influencer.

Once your beliefs and fears are worked on, they slowly start impacting your actions and thus the consequences are different. Over time this will become a habit and the new and desired patterns will be your new reality. This is how we will complete the cycle and it usually takes 12-18 months. In case there are other patterns to work on we can start again."

"Sure coach. Looking forward to it. When do we begin?" said Kabir, getting up and shaking my hand.

He was a model coachee. Never missed a session and made an honest attempt at everything we agreed. There were as many slips and misses as there were successes but he was a quick and a keen learner. The proof of the pudding was when a year later his 360 report showed a huge jump in the desired parameters and he showed it to me with much glee and gratitude. He was also, as always, cracking his targets and the company was doing better than ever before. He became a firm believer of Get Real coaching and asked me to coach many of his senior colleagues.