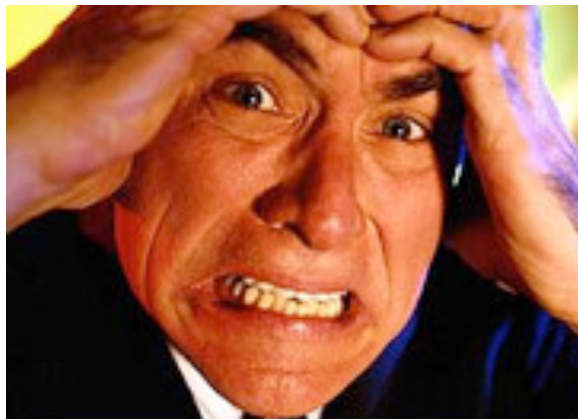


What's Wrong with My Boss?

**By Charlie Lang, Managing Partner of Progress-U Ltd.
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"The beauty of empowering others is that your own power is not diminished in the process."

-- Barbara Colorose



What's Wrong with My Boss?

“I wish he would just tell me what to do.” “I asked him for advice and all I got were questions.” “What’s wrong with her today?”

Managers who have just started using coaching to manage their people often face resistance from their staff in the first weeks, sometimes months afterwards.

Reactions like the statements above are quite common and make it a daunting task for the managers to continue with coaching their people. They think, “Wasn’t it so much easier to be simply directive? Also, it seems that my people prefer it that way!”

If you experienced this situation, you may have wondered: Was my coach training a waste of money and time? Is coaching something that works in Western cultures but not here in Asia?

Not so. I admit that the traditional Asian culture favors the seniority principle, i.e. the more senior you are, the more respected you tend to be and consequently the more you are considered to be able to give good advice.

Also, many people here in Asia have a strong belief that it’s a manager’s job to tell them the best thing to do. Consequently, key to a successful start in coaching your people, particularly in Asia, is the effective management of their expectations **before** starting to use coaching with them.

How can coaching be successfully applied?

What’s Wrong with My Boss?

Well, being a coach myself, I won't just simply give you advice. Here are some questions for your consideration:

- Have you made the benefits of coaching clear to your people? Don't forget to communicate the benefits clearly.
- If your people are used to being directed most of the time, what would you need to say to them so that they would be more open to being coached?
- When people ask for your advice, ask yourself: Are they in a position to develop a good solution by themselves? How can you best assist them in their discovery without taking away their ownership? Remember, you may always share your thoughts **after** they developed a solution but only for their consideration. It must be clear to them that it's ok whether or not they follow your proposition.

Resistance is typically the result of a discrepancy between expectations and the actual responses they get from you whenever they approach you with a problem. If you want to make coaching work, then you will need to manage your people's expectations to minimize the resistance.

Let me give you an example. Stephanie (not her real name), the department head of a customer service department in an insurance company was one of the participants in our coach training program for managers. In the past, she used to apply a mostly directive style to get things done. After the coach training she wanted to start applying her new coaching skills and mindset.

What's Wrong with My Boss?

In one case where she felt coaching would be appropriate, one of her staff, Melanie, complained about the slow response from the assessors in the claims department. She said, "Stephanie, our customers keep complaining that it takes us weeks to give even a first response to their claims. What can we do about that?"

Stephanie was tempted to tell her what she thinks would be right to do but remembered the principle of ownership and thought that in this case Melanie could find a solution instead. So she responded, "Melanie, what do you think we could do about that?"

Melanie looked quite puzzled because Stephanie answered her question with a question. Then she said, "I don't know, you are the boss, can you please help?"

Seeing that Melanie seemed not be able to come to a solution, Stephanie finally gave her the advice to send an intermediate note to the customers telling them that it might take a few weeks until the claim is processed and that she is sorry about this delay.

Melanie seemed to be satisfied with this response and Stephanie wondered if coaching won't work with Melanie.

What's Wrong with My Boss?

The key questions are:

1. Was Melanie really not in a position to develop an answer?

Answer: In this case she certainly was in a position to find a solution.

2. If Melanie was in a position to find a solution, what would be the benefits for Melanie, Stephanie, and perhaps the organization had Melanie been able to find a solution by herself?

Answer: Since Melanie is closer to the case she might have more insights than Stephanie at how it could be handled. She would start to accept more responsibility and might potentially save Stephanie's time in the future because she will be able to find solutions by herself rather than ask for Stephanie's advice all the time. Besides, chances are good that Melanie will become more engaged and motivated in her work.

3. What would Stephanie need to do differently to get Melanie's buy-in to accept more responsibility?

Answer: Stephanie now adopts a different leadership style which benefits all parties involved (see 2.), and she must let Melanie know about this coaching style and its benefits. Stephanie will need to be more rigorous in applying coaching and rather than falling back into the old convenient behavior, assist Melanie in her thinking process to find an own solution. For example, she could ask Melanie further questions like, "What did you try so far to resolve this problem?", "What do you think is the reason that the claims department takes so long?", "How could you assist the claims department in speeding up their process?", "Would you need my assistance in that?", etc.

What's Wrong with My Boss?

Conclusion

When you start coaching your staff, you may face some resistance at first. The key to a successful start is actively managing their expectations. Over time, both you and your staff will realize the great benefits of this new approach.



Charlie Lang is an Executive Coach and Trainer who founded Progress-U Limited in 2002. His mission is to assist his clients in becoming excellent leaders for the benefit of all stakeholders. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Public Speaker and Author of over 100 articles related to leadership, change management and innovative sales.

End of 2004, he started authoring the book "The Groupness Factor" (see <http://www.progressu.com.hk/Groupness-book.htm>) which got published in August 2005. Charlie's articles got printed in publications like Human Resources, FZ Magazine, Banking Today, SCMP, Effective Executive and CareerTimes.

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