Harvard Business Review

Digital Article

Coaching

Are You Ready to Be Coached?

by Brenda Steinberg

This document is authorized for use only by Cheryl Haynes (clshaynz@gmail.com). Copying or posting is an infringement of copyright. Please contact customerservice@harvardbusiness.org or 800-988-0886 for additional copies.

Are You Ready to Be Coached?

by Brenda Steinberg

Published on HBR.org / October 30, 2020 / Reprint H05YF3

Jay Rew/Getty Images

Executive coaching can help you achieve higher performance and greater personal satisfaction at work. While you may be aware that you need to make changes — in behavior, mindset, or both — to advance your career, you won't reap the benefits of coaching unless you're prepared to fully engage in the process. This requires a substantial investment of time and effort, so before you move forward, the most important question you should ask yourself is, "Am I ready to be coached?"

HBR Copyright © 2020 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.

This document is authorized for use only by Cheryl Haynes (clshaynz@gmail.com). Copying or posting is an infringement of copyright. Please contact customerservice@harvardbusiness.org or 800-988-0886 for additional copies.

Having discussed challenging client experiences with many accomplished executive coaches, it's clear that the corresponding question — "Is this leader coachable?" — figures prominently in their evaluation of whether and how to proceed. Drawing on these conversations, I identified seven core characteristics that differentiate leaders who evolve through coaching from those who don't.

Tolerance for discomfort. Successful coaching requires you to be proactive in embracing new ways of perceiving and acting. In doing so, you will likely experience fear or emotional blocks about new realizations and realities. You must be able to endure these periods of discomfort to realize the rewards of taking new and different approaches.

Openness to experimentation. Trying something new means taking risks, and experiments with new behaviors may not work the first time. Waiting for the perfect timing or perfect performance will stand in the way of progress. If you think you already have the answers and are unwilling to explore new options, you are unlikely to be open or do the necessary reflection to change. You have to try out new ideas and actions, fail, learn, and try again.

Ability to look beyond the rational. Behavior is not rational — it's driven by emotions like fear, anger, and pride. Just because you "know" what to do doesn't mean that you'll act accordingly. You'll gain a deeper understanding of your own behaviors and relationships if you explore their emotional dimensions.

Willingness to take responsibility. It's hard to change if you don't believe you have the power to shape your future. Blaming the organization, the boss, too many responsibilities, and so on will block you from growth. Even if there is some truth in your reasoning, it's

HBR Copyright © 2020 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.

This document is authorized for use only by Cheryl Haynes (clshaynz@gmail.com). Copying or posting is an infringement of copyright. Please contact customerservice@harvardbusiness.org or 800-988-0886 for additional copies.

impossible to move forward if you see yourself as a victim. You have to hold yourself accountable for making progress.

Capacity for forgiveness. Even if you feel you've been mistreated, it's essential to make peace with the past and channel your energy into progress. The need to "be right" or "show them" is rarely helpful for you or the people you work with. You must be willing to forgive and move on.

Self-discipline. Somewhat counterintuitively, your development as a leader will likely require you to let go of ways of thinking and behaving that helped make you successful in the past and be prepared to live with the consequences. It may be hard for others to accept changes in your personal or work relationships. For example, you may have succeeded up to this point by saying yes to helping out colleagues and making yourself available. But disciplining yourself to say no and learning to focus on what's important are essential parts of becoming a more effective leader. Even if those around you bristle at you no longer being available 24/7, you have to stay focused on your coaching goals.

Ability to ask for support. Finally, you must be engaged with other potential supporters, not just your coach, throughout the coaching process. You are accountable for change, but you will develop faster if you make yourself vulnerable to others (judiciously), including your boss, peers, and even direct reports. Share goals, ask for advice, listen with curiosity, and most critically, accept and act on the constructive feedback you receive.

It's normal to feel both excitement and trepidation when deciding to work with an executive coach. Start by assessing the degree to which you have these seven characteristics, then discuss which are the most challenging for you. You may mutually decide that it's not the right time

HBR Copyright © 2020 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.

This document is authorized for use only by Cheryl Haynes (clshaynz@gmail.com). Copying or posting is an infringement of copyright. Please contact customerservice@harvardbusiness.org or 800-988-0886 for additional copies.

to proceed. More likely, it will help you develop a stronger relationship and a deeper awareness of how to meaningfully develop as a leader through coaching.

Brenda Steinberg is an executive coach and leadership consultant with more than 20 years of experience in working with senior leaders. She regularly contributes to executive education programs at IMD Business School and works as a consultant with Genesis Advisers.

HBR Copyright © 2020 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.

This document is authorized for use only by Cheryl Haynes (clshaynz@gmail.com). Copying or posting is an infringement of copyright. Please contact customerservice@harvardbusiness.org or 800-988-0886 for additional copies.