

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2      SEPTEMBER 2007

### COACHING OR MENTORING...ANY VALUE?

In Corporate America there are hundreds of people who work to enjoy life. This principle is often unconscious and causes them to compromise their priorities everyday. In the past twenty years of working in corporations, I always conducted the mandatory meetings required for each employee. In my last position, each of my staff received a formal mid-year and final review. As a manager of people, I knew that my staff and associates needed more than a twice a year face to face. So, I openly offered more time to coach or to mentor my staff. I always had an open door policy. This policy meant that other associates could request some of my "personal" time. And believe me, they did.

The "value" of coaching or mentoring is only measurable or quantifiable if the recipient is committed to this experience. Secondly, for those individuals that were not members of my staff, I always asked them to list the expected results from this new relationship. In life or work, you get payback if and only if you commit to a certain endeavor. A common axiom in golf is "advice on the golf course is worth exactly what you paid for it...nothing". If you want to learn how to golf better, pay for lessons. The same approach is applicable to coaching or mentoring.

Unlike those informal mentoring relationships, professional relationships are often discarded as costing too much. Why? Everybody has friends, family, relatives or business acquaintances they often rely on for advice and insight. Their time and advice is free. The difference between the two is cost, expectation and outcome. I suggest that a formal coaching and mentoring relationship with a professional who is experienced in your field is often times a better fit. The key to learning is simply

experiencing something from a different point of view. Someone who has experienced your type of position, an approximate career role or, a similar situation in a corporation is more likely to give you advice that is practical. Secondly, if the coach or mentor is truly experienced their advice is worth something. To use another axiom "been there, done that" is appropriate when you work with a professional.

If you are lucky enough to have people around you who care and provide you with good advice, that is fantastic. This is not the norm in Corporate America. From my experience, most managers are not good coaches and mentors. They have never been trained nor do they have the aptitude, or the time. When you engage in a professional coaching or mentoring relationship you are purchasing all three: experience/ aptitude, a structured outcome and a commitment of time.

For example, when I moved to Minnesota in the mid nineties, I wanted to learn how to catch walleyes. I purchased and read magazine articles, bought a boat and necessary equipment, studied videos and practiced on local lakes. For me to go to the next level, I needed to learn from a professional. So, I searched for a professional guide that I could hire for three days. I also searched and chose the best lake in northern Minnesota that met my desire to catch walleyes. The lake I selected was Lake Winnie by Bemidji.

That lake is not very commercialized. It is surrounded by both reservation land and the Chippewa National Forest. While reading and talking to people, I learned about a

guide who goes by the name of the "Griz". I hired the Griz and went fishing. Wow! Having fished Winnie for almost thirty-five years, he knew the lake and how to catch walleyes. He let me ask questions about his boat, equipment, how to locate fish in the spring and summer, and basically, taught me how to catch walleyes in that lake.

Think about it, I could have struggled fishing by myself or with friends. To progress to the level that I wanted could have taken me years. With that professional fishing guide, I paid to learn from his experience. It was worth it. With the Griz, I learned how to catch fish rather than just go fishing.

Is hiring a coach or mentor of any value? Yes, if you are willing to commit time and money to the experience. You first need to decide the type of coach or mentor you require. You can engage someone who has practical experience in your profession or career. Or, you may choose an executive management professional who is trained in the field of Psychology, leadership development and communication. Just like my three days of fishing with a professional guide, a coaching engagement is not an on going relationship. It is structured with specific agreed upon outcomes and timelines. If for any reason the professional relationship falters, the agreement should be terminated.

If you are interested in learning more and want to receive a free consultation about the coaching or mentoring process, please contact the MINCON Group.

*The "value" of coaching or mentoring is only measurable or quantifiable if the recipient is committed to this experience.*

Karl E. Wondrak  
kwondrak@mincogroup.com