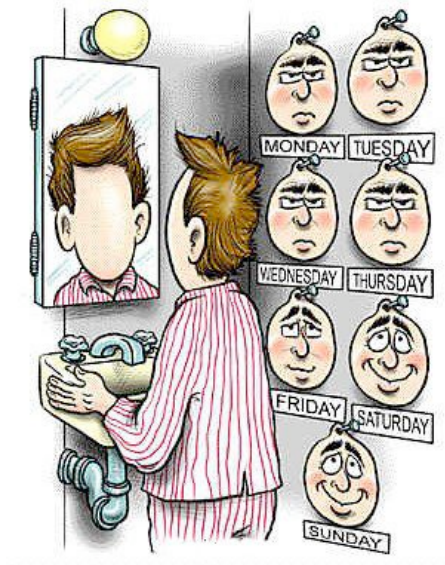


From the coach's bench: Answers to problems lie within you

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Andrea, Asia-Pacific's regional sales director of a United States-based technology company, was coached before when she was stationed in the US. Having seen the advantages, she decided to commission me when she encountered difficulty in her job.

To make a long story short, although as the head of sales she was able to achieve her top-line turnover targets, margins were on the decline. Subsequently, bottom-line profit targets fell short and she received feedback from her boss, the regional CEO, that her performance was unsatisfactory.

The focus of my coaching assignment was to help her find out why margins were on the decline and to fix this.

When I asked her why she thought margins were going down, she was quick to point out that her salespeople in the region were not tough enough as negotiators, and sealed deals at prices that were too low.

She also said that competition in certain countries was extremely tough, and price dumping was not unheard of.

Having been a sales director and vice-president of sales myself for several years, it would have been easy for me to jump into "consulting mode" and give her advice on what she could do to improve the situation. However, as a coach, it is not my job to give advice but to help my clients achieve higher levels of self-awareness and understanding so that they can make the best possible choices.

Also, in this case, I noticed that Andrea had the mindset of a victim. Unless I could make her take responsibility for the situation, it would be difficult for her to

reflect inwardly and come up with good ideas on how to improve the margins.

As a coach, I usually use a three-step process.

- Appreciate or acknowledge my client's way of thinking. Opposing it, usually, only makes the person defensive.
- Make her imagine what the ideal situation would look like. This focuses her mind on the optimal outcome and creates positive energy.
- Ask her to define the gap between the ideal and real situations in detail, and what she can do to help bridge this gap.

Andrea started to realise that she was part of the problem because she pushed hard to achieve the sales targets, which gave the frontline salespeople the wrong message - "sales volume before margin".

Also, Andrea noticed that she needed to provide more support to frontline staff for them to better understand her company's value proposition and why customers should pay a higher price than what their competitors were charging.

She finally took responsibility for the situation and more importantly, for shaping the future of her region's sales development.

As a consultant, my advice would have been similar to the ideas she came up with. Also, the process of determining what needs to be done would have been considerably shorter.

So is coaching a waste of time in such situations? I don't believe so.

Andrea now has full ownership over her ideas, making her much more passionate about implementing them than if the same ideas came from my advice.

Had I used the consulting approach, Andrea would most probably still have been stuck in a victim mindset and, as a result, might not really drive for change.

Andrea's ideas are tailored exactly to her situation, while my ideas, although similar, would have been more generic and less specifically suited.

The secret of high-impact coaching lies in this principle of ownership by a party being coached.

In contrast, in training or teaching, ownership lies with the trainer or teacher instead of the trainee or student.

----- End of Article as published in SCMP -----



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.

Charlie is a founding member and President (2008/09) of the Hong Kong International Coaching Community.