#11 Your Role As A Coach – Curated Video Series
Crucial Conversations for Women in Management

1. Topic

As a leader, one of the most important roles you will ever play is developing your employees. Helping people to **awaken their own leadership potential**, and to connect with a deep **sense of purpose**, is a privilege. It can be very fulfilling for the employee, and, for the leader serving as a coach, when well done. Most leaders aspire to leave behind them a **talented cadre** of people who can lead the organization to new successes.

As opposed to being focused on the external aspects of leadership, whether crafting a strategic vision, or managing budgets and programs, when you perform the role of a coach, you are inviting someone to embark on **an inner journey**. The person who receives coaching, or, the ‘coachee,’ is exploring their inner identity, and their purpose, so that they may engage in a conscious and intentional manner of living, where they focus on self-leadership and mastery of the self. Instead of allowing the circumstances of life, and self-limiting behaviours, to define one’s path, effective coaching skills reinforce the individual’s ability to assert their core values, identity, and passionate purpose, aligning their daily actions with their ‘inner leader.’

Most human beings engage in behaviours that are important professional strengths for which they have been rewarded. Their particular strengths are often the source of promotions in the workplace. Unfortunately, too much of a good thing can become a **double-edged sword**. The individual who has been promoted for their attention to detail, comprehensive knowledge and expertise, and who is extremely conscientious and attentive to high standards, can suddenly find that these traits are preventing them from advancing. This can happen when conscientiousness becomes a form of compulsiveness, when perfectionism becomes the enemy of timeliness, when a singular focus becomes a form of rigidity and control, and, when personal excellence stands in the way of the delegation of tasks to other team members.

As a leader, you are able to enter into a coaching relationship if the employee grants their consent to be coached and selects you to serve as a coach. They may ask you to help them build on their strengths and to help them improve in areas where they may be less proficient. If you are asked to serve as a coach, it is a **relationship of trust** that must be respected.

The role of a coach is not to provide answers, as you would in your substantive role as a leader or manager, but it is to ask questions that enable the person being coached to devise their own answers and to identify corresponding actions to be taken. In effect, you help your employee to examine the consequences of beliefs or behaviours that are damaging or limiting. You are asking salient questions, such as: “**What does this belief give you?** How does it help you or harm you?” For example, a woman scientist who is seeking advancement may choose not to apply to a selection or promotion process because she believes that her experience has to be bullet-proof and perfect in every respect before she puts her candidacy forward. Meanwhile,
you have observed, as a manager, that her male colleagues, with less experience, are entering similar competitive processes and are being rewarded with promotions. If you are asked to coach this **scientist**, you might ask her why she feels she has to be perfect before she submits her candidacy. Coaching, in action, means **exposing beliefs that open up new possibilities for people**, enabling them to do what was impossible to do previously. Often, coaching entails delving into fears or shadow beliefs that are standing in the way of someone’s ability to achieve their heartfelt dreams. Clarifying strengths - and areas where leadership growth commitments are required - is the essence of coaching. Often, you will encounter officers, managers, and executives who excel in the technical, managerial, and functional areas of their work, but need to develop further emotional intelligence to be able to connect with people in a constructive way.

The coach does not travel the road for the person being coached. Instead, they invite the coachee to travel the road needed to assure their personal and professional growth. Tom Gegax has said: “Once leaders commit to doing the deeply personal work of cutting through the layers of ego, they begin to clarify how to make an authentic contribution in all their spheres of influence.” One of the enormous benefits of serving as a coach for your employees and peers is that it causes you to reflect more deeply on your own leadership example. As you see your own behaviours through the eyes of others, and learn from their life experience, you continue to transform yourself to become a more effective leader.

### 2. Assignment

Seek permission to serve as a coach for someone in your workplace. Identify someone who has sought you out for advice and who is genuinely open to being coached, as a means of achieving a personal or professional breakthrough. That is, speak to an employee or peer who wants to do something differently or that they have never done before. Determine if they are prepared to align their commitments for action with their **declared purpose or stretch goal**. Before you do, take a look at your own leadership behavior. Is it coming from a place of purpose? Have you become a ‘**human doing**,’ executing a long list of urgent items? Or, have you been able to lead from a place of vision, as a human being, where you preserved the ability to pursue larger dreams, in a spirit of creativity?

Once you have received permission to provide coaching, you can ask the following questions to begin your coaching conversation:

a) What is your declared purpose as a leader? **What do you stand for?**
b) What motivates you to do your work and is present when you are performing at your personal best?
c) Tell me about a time when you felt you were living out your life’s purpose and were happiest. What was happening when you felt that you were your most energetic, authentic, and creative self, full of life? **Who were you being in that moment?**
Curated Video Titles

d) How are you **expressing your gifts** to make a difference as a leader?
e) Are you expanding your boundaries to give yourself permission to pursue your dreams?
f) If you were not afraid to fail or of encountering negative consequences, what would you like to do that you are not currently doing? What is standing in your way, or **holding you back**, other than your fears?
g) How can you overcome these fears to achieve your purpose and to make a difference in the world?
h) What personal action commitments are you prepared to make, in order to achieve a desired future state?
i) What measures of success will you apply, with specific timelines applied, to get to your preferred destination?
j) The next time you face a perceived loss or a challenge, how might you react differently?
k) How can you shift from a problem focus to an opportunity focus? From a seat where circumstances may overwhelm you to one where you adopt a purpose-based focus?

3. **Video Descriptions and Instructions**

Reflection, and the inner journey exploring leadership, is essential to learning, reinvention, renewal, becoming resilient and growing as a leader. Leaders seek to create value in their relationships with others, infusing their daily actions with reciprocity and giving, not just producing results at all costs.

Leaders recognize that all employees seek meaning in their work, recognition and ownership. It is your role as a leader to empower people to innovate and to contribute to the organization in a positive way.

You are being asked to view the first video, entitled, “The Powerful Coaching Conversation.” The video is almost 4 minutes in length and it is produced by Blueprint Leadership Development (April 2, 2014). The expert coach and Vice President of the firm, Jim Boneau, invites you to act as a ‘coach leader,’ listening for passion, purpose, values and emotions in the conversations that you have with your employees. He asserts that leadership is deployed as you coach people, one conversation at a time.

As you assume your role as a coach, you are asked to operate on the basis that others are very capable. You are looking for ways in which you can serve the other person, engaged in a process of inquiry that yields insights and opportunities to act. The link can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WHKcMBew34](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WHKcMBew34)

The second video you are being asked to watch is by Marshall Goldsmith. It is entitled, “The Six Question Process: Coaching for Leaders,” and it was filmed on September 30, 2014. It is slightly more than six minutes in duration. Goldsmith explores the six questions that he routinely asks leaders to put to their employees in a coaching conversation. These questions, when asked of each person, shape a culture that supports sustainable value creation. Employees **lead by virtue of who they are** and what they care about. The individual’s sense of purpose can be
aligned with a compelling organizational purpose. The framework provided by Goldsmith’s questions becomes a process of co-creation where the leader-as-coach helps the employee being coached to deliver on their expressed intention and to grow professionally. The video can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYhws73vm0c

4. Follow-Up Activities and Application

After viewing these two videos, ask the following questions:

a) As a coach, am I listening more than I am speaking?
b) Am I asking questions in a way that draws out what really matters to the person being coached?
c) Am I encouraging the person I am coaching to see breakdowns as a temporary setback on the path to accomplishments? Rather than something that represents a personal failure?
d) Am I offering assessments (i.e. judgements, projections, opinions) as opposed to asking questions that allow the coachee to test their own perspectives and assumptions?
e) Am I offering the employee being coached the occasion to reflect on their leadership purpose, coming from the inside out?
f) Am I helping people to break the grip of a self-sabotaging story that they may be using? For example, the story of: “why should I bother to do this if no one cares?” Are you helping your employees to understand that when they choose not to act they forfeit the ability to create the future they want?
g) Are you helping to disclose how people need to be different, think differently or act differently, in order to advance their action strategies?
h) Are you encouraging people to pursue their personal aspirations and desire to excel by setting stretch goals? Are you challenging their self-limiting assumptions?
i) Are you listening for the other person’s passion, purpose, values and emotions that govern their actions?
j) Have you asked those you coach what they are most proud of? That they are doing well?
k) Do you help the coachee by reframing relationships that may be standing in the way of their ability to move forward?
l) Are you committed to helping others to perform at their personal best levels?

As you answer these questions, you expand the limits of the possible to go into what might have been considered the impossible. A critical mass of leaders, with a commitment to personal leadership growth, can accelerate organizational progress. Setting growth commitments with those you coach is an important task. If you are interested in obtaining your professional coaching designation, there are many bodies in Canada and in the US with whom you can begin this journey.

5. Expert Knowledge

Dawn Nicholson-O’Brien is the President and CEO of Celtic Oracle, an executive services consulting firm. A former executive in the Government of Canada, Dawn served in executive
level roles during three and a half decades. She also served as the Vice President of the Institute on Governance, has developed and delivered advanced leadership programs for executives, and, she is the recipient of numerous leadership awards. Dawn is a sought after speaker and author (see www.celticoracle.ca)

6. Key Words

Key words include: coach; coachee; inner journey; inner leader; relationship of trust; intentional manner of living; listening for possibility; breakdowns; breakthroughs; assessments; self-limiting beliefs; stretch goals; shadow beliefs; setting growth commitments; personal aspirations; reframing relationships.

7. Additional Resources and Readings


Submitted by: Dawn Nicholson-O'Brien
President and CEO, Celtic Oracle
613-592-7708
dnicholsonobrien@rogers.com