

A Coach For Strategy

by John Johnson, Changemaking Systems, LLC

A major part of work with clients comes in the form of coaching, either individual executives or managers or teams of them or both.

A coach focuses on whatever the development needs of the client might be, often times with technically competent and productive individuals who are relationship-challenged or are lacking finesse in handling people problems. Or a coach works with individuals who relate well to others, but who find it more difficult to be accountable for delivering projects on time and on budget and difficult to organize themselves and others well around specific work tasks.

There is one dimension in which a coach is seen as a rare coaching resource, and that is coaching in the area of strategy.

A coach is called upon to work with individual leaders to help them develop their skills in strategic thinking. The coach does not bring in a planning package that the leader can just plug in and use by rote. The coach helps that leader understand the dimensions of strategy, what it means to search for the right strategic questions, and how to put together an approach to strategic thinking, planning, and management that makes sense for the specific organization.

Even when a coach works with a management team to facilitate strategic planning, the coach really is coaching the team on how to think about and execute their strategic choices. And the coach is helping them have a good discussion on their most important subjects. The coach is experienced enough with the general subject of strategy that the coach recognizes what the group is avoiding or ignoring, either because they don't know it's important or because it is too controversial or too difficult. Then the coach challenges them on the subjects that have been left out of the discussion, and the coach challenges them on their decisions, so that they can more readily stand behind those decisions.

The coach teaches leaders to become more strategic, to be able to prepare a strategic vision and framework for the organization, and to put together a strategic planning process that makes sense for them at this point in time.

Chose a coach for leaders on strategy, not simply a facilitator of planning. The result is that the organization's strategic capacity is increased, not just another cycle of planning completed.

The coach should be a general development coach, who brings the client some unusual depth in learning about strategy and becoming more strategic.

John Johnson, Changemaking Systems, LLC, founded Changemaking Systems in 1982. His professional background is diverse. He has worked as a consultant to businesses, a general manager, a community organizer, counselor, the vice president of a 120-member professional firm, an administrator, educator, writer, small business owner, and a minister. .

His formal learning has come through Gustavus Adolphus College, Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary, the Preparing Educational Trainers and Consultants study and laboratory series at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the University of Michigan School of Social Research, as well as many days of workshops, seminars, labs, practicums, and tutorials on the various dimensions of organizational, personal and management development, including those of the National Training Laboratory.

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