

PERFORMANCE CONSULTING VERSUS PERFORMANCE COACHING

By Jean Strosinski, PCC

First article of six in the series: *Coaching for Performance*

In this first, of a series of articles, I will offer some insights to clarify the phrases, Performance Consultant and Performance Coach with definitions, distinctions and the benefits received by those who “Coach” for performance. My primary resource is the second edition of Coaching for Performance, authored by John Whitmore. The book is one of ten in the *People Skills for Professionals Series*, published by Nicholas Brealey Publishing of London. I have found the book to be a valuable resource for developing and enhancing management skills to coach the performance of employees, colleagues and team members.

Do you see the *professional you* as a Performance Consultant or a Performance Coach? Recently, I have become aware of these phrases being used interchangeably throughout our work environments and among our colleagues. It is important to make a clear distinction between these two phrases. While a person may offer their services both as a consultant and coach, the roles are separate, sometimes employing unique skills, and are performed through varied and different activities. You might consider the primary difference being their target audience or the level at which these HPT professionals practice.

Most dictionaries will not offer any great distinctions for the words, “consulting” and “coaching.” Their definitions are similar - the giving of advice, professional or otherwise, or instruction to those practicing in a profession. There is a stronger implication that “consulting” comes from one who holds some degree of expertise for the area or topic in which they are offering advice. However, in the evolving world of HPT, a performance consultant has come to mean one who analyzes and assesses performance discrepancies in an organization or work environment. The consultant may then map out a plan, or

design the appropriate methods and tools for improving performance for that organization or workplace. The intended result is often increased productivity, decreased costs, efficient and effective work practices and a safer working environment,

The performance coach works with the individual. Their role is to focus on the person’s future potential to maximize the individual’s performance with a goal of supporting their learning rather than teaching them. The focus is not on past performance. Performance coaching, as practiced by a manager, can become an essential style or tool for optimizing the employee’s potential and job performance.

The two key elements for coaching performance are awareness and responsibility. (Whitmore, 1996) Awareness is simply the knowing of what is happening around you. Responsibility occurs when we knowingly choose or take responsibility for our thoughts and actions. As our commitment increases, so does our performance. These key elements are attitudinal factors and Whitmore suggests that our state of mind (our attitudes) is key to our level of performance.

If your answer to the first question in the article is *Performance Coach*, the following skills would be necessary for you to support an individual in achieving their awareness and coming to accept responsibility. Notice that technical expertise is included in the “additional skills” list.

Necessary for coaching:

Patient	Perceptive
Detached	Aware
Supportive	Self-aware
Interested	Attentive
Good listener	Retentive

Additional skills (the nice to have):

Technical expertise
Knowledge
Experience
Credibility
Authority

I will close this article with a question from John Whitmore. He asks of the Performance Coach -

What will you coach for?

Performance – the required actions of an individual,

OR

Real Performance – the actions that go beyond what is expected, meeting one's own highest standard ... the expression of one's full potential?

We can fully practice as a Performance Consultant in our profession, but is it enough in our profession to be a Performance Coach or do we wish to raise our standards and be the Real Performance Coach?

Jean Strosinski is a performance coach/consultant and owner of Constructive Choices, Inc. Jean works with individuals and corporations to help them achieve high performance supported by constructive choices. Jean can be reached by phone at 505.286.4079 or email at jean@constructivechoices.com.