

Coaching For Leadership

Using the 3x3 Feedback Process To Enhance Leadership Skills

The Benefits of Balance

Bob was like many of the men and women who come into our Executive Communications Seminars. As soon as we videotaped his talk and got into the private coaching session, he said, "OK, just tell me what I'm doing wrong so I can fix it." Direct and to the point, like most over-achievers who just want to find the problem and fix it. It's as if they were machines – all performance and without feelings. But leaders have the same feelings as anyone else, and as we'll see, it is also an important area of coaching that is often neglected.

There is a simple system that we use in giving feedback that works for any behavior or characteristics in which you may want to give, and get, coaching. It's called the 3 by 3 coaching model. We'll describe here how it works, and then apply it to what we find to be key leadership characteristics that make the most difference in long-term effectiveness.

This methodology works even more effectively for leaders. It ensures there will be the balanced feedback that the over-achiever professes to eschew. And it is quick, and continuous, and can be easily adapted to a variety of different situations where a leader might want to solicit feedback.

The 3x3 Coaching Model

The most consistent coaching model we've found uses the "Three-By-Three Rule." It is a process of giving feedback that we originally developed coaching communications performance in situations where there was no audio or video feedback available. It is short, sweet and balanced – and particularly appropriate for leaders who want to get right to the point.

3x3 coaching is when you give three strengths and three weaknesses in analyzing performance and behavior. It forces you to give balanced feedback, since you are giving



three positives (Keepers) along with three areas to work on (Improvements). And just three – no more, no less. In any situation there are literally dozens of pros and cons in behavior if you really think about it. You only want to emphasize the first ones that come to mind. They don't have to be the most important, nor the most profound – just the first ones that occur to you. If they stand out for you, they probably are the same ones that stand out for most people, and thus become the most important in practical terms. 3x3 feedback also creates a forced choice.

Usually people are comfortable giving the positives – and uncomfortable giving the negatives. Or some people can be overly critical – leaving few strokes of encouragement for the person coached. Either method is not productive in giving valuable feedback for improvement. If you are forced to give a balanced 3x3 – the

person will always feel supported while taking away valuable lessons to work on as well. And this is just as important for the leader and over-achiever as for anybody else. Three is a good number. Don't ask for a dozen positives and negatives. That's too many for people to give — and too much for you to remember. For good learning and skill development in yourself and the others around you, just remember The Three-By-Three Rule.

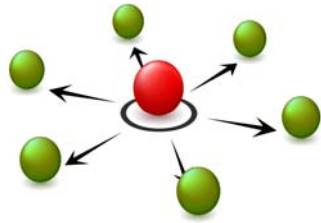
3x3 feedback can be given in almost any setting. It can be solicited by the person/leader in groups (i.e. at and after a speech or meeting.) It can be given by an Executive Coach to a leader on a systematic basis. It can be focused on certain characteristics, or be given in general and broad terms. It is flexible and adaptable. It is most useful when you solicit it and give it often.

The Three-By-Three rule allows you to make course corrections, like a guided missile, as you keep moving onward and upward. You continuously get feedback, you continuously update your awareness of your skills and habits, and you continuously make course corrections. This is the only way to hit the target.

Now let's take a look at how this applies to leadership.

Leadership Characteristics: The Three Cs

Communicate



Of all the skills, communicating effectively is the most important. Leaders listen to their people and their world, synthesize, and then speak to influence others to action. That influence is most powerful through the spoken word.

We only have to look at the legendary leaders such as Churchill, Roosevelt, Kennedy and Thatcher to see influence in action. And two modern day examples of Presidents Reagan and Clinton dramatically make



the point. Bill Clinton achieved office, and then stayed in office, largely because of his communication skills. And so many of today's candidates are riding high from their communications impact—think of Barack Obama and Mike Huckabee.

Leaders communicate with energy. They speak with a confidence and certainty that is made up of specific behaviors: voice, eye communication, movement and gestures. They smile at people, and lis-

ten. All of these are skills that are learnable, and coachable. The best leaders are also informed and focused in their communications. They don't ramble or meander. They have a point of view, and they get to it, persuasively. And the best of the best can entertain a bit in the process.

Here's how a brief written 3x3 might look on a leader who has just finished giving a quarterly update in an open forum to her 150 employees:

“Leaders communicate with energy. They speak with a confidence and certainty that is made up of specific behaviors.”

	
Keepers	Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good and focused content, you considered their interests • Started on time, and ended on time • Humorous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading the speech cut down on your energy and eye contact • Your voice was hard to hear at times • The room was too crowded and hot

Competence



Performance and accountability measurements are standards in the business world, as well they should be. The specifics of the numbers are important feedback tools for leaders, but they are not the subjects here.

What is also important is to have feedback and coaching on the skills that lead to superior performance in an organization. The shadow of a leader falls long, and the behavior of the leader has impact far beyond the immediate results because the leader is always showing by example. What the

leader does speaks so loud it often communicates more than what is said, particularly if it is inconsistent with what is said. So coaching in the following three leadership competencies has the greatest payoff in creating action in others and results:

I. Focus

The truly great leaders have a singleness of purpose. They have a mission. They are passionate about it. They set targets and goals. Those goals are specific, physical, time-oriented and measurable. They repeat the vision, mission and goals

often. Repeating good ideas is worth repeating. Repeating good ideas is worth repeating.

2. Responsibility

Leaders don't wait for things to happen, they make things happen. They are not those who wait for direction from others but they give direction to others. (Skillfully communicated, in a caring manner.) Leaders like accountability, and thrive on achievement and creation. The best leaders do their achieving and creating with and through others. They are not lone rangers.

Leadership Characteristics: The Three Cs

Competence (continued)

A good leader can be an entrepreneur, or a manager, but if they are going to reach their optimum they will be leveraging any talents they have through the collaborative efforts of others. Leaders take responsibility, but they delegate, and keep others accountable. Most leaders we know are harder on themselves in their own accountability than they are on others.

3. Forward Lean

Years ago, Bert Decker made a documentary film on Robert Kennedy, and the writer of the script wrote a memorable line to describe Kennedy's arrival as a new Senator in Washington, DC. "Senator Kennedy hit the ground leaning forward." That captures a quality that strikes us as most important to success in anyone – going about life with a "forward lean." Volunteering to take on a job. Agreeing to give a speech. Looking for the opportunity in adversity. Looking at themselves as leaders and models and mentors to others.

qualities to coach leaders on in this area (notice that the "rule of 3" is continuously at work!)

Staying in the disciplines. The pressures and stress of leadership almost requires a certain amount of organization and routine in life. Leaders are usually disciplined people, who regularly exercise, or read, or pray, or have dates with their children, or eat certain foods, or a combination of these things – and many others.

Leaders are not sarcastic. In relating to others, leaders have a forward lean of encouragement. They are cheerleaders. Sarcasm, caustic banter and double-edged kidding can be fun – and often men fall into that habit as a way of relating to their buddies. The problem is that when you "might be kidding," people don't know whether you're kidding or not. That lack of complete trust can be a real detriment to a leader's credibility and effectiveness. Best to be a cheerleader.

not excluding the present) are tech savvy. They know and use the computer and the internet. Today is a new age of communicating and commerce – by voice, phone, cell, email, PDA's, www, .coms and wireless. Leaders know what means of communication to use when they want information, or when they want action, and are able to use all the tools. It is effective to be an "early adopter."

The competence of leaders can be a laundry list of desired characteristics, but coaching learning would go a long way by just giving 3 by 3 coaching on focus, accountability and "forward lean."

Now, let's look at a 3x3. Here is an actual 3x3 that Bert gave to a leader of a national service organization after he requested some accountability and feedback. He has several hundred people reporting to him with a budget of over \$10 million.



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To do this there are yet three

The leaders of the future (and

	
Keepers	Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great focus, you continuously organize people into single purpose teams • Strong example of discipline by running and praying every morning • Always straightforward – people can trust what you say 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email and computer skills are poor • Late adopter – better to model competence by learning the new tools that are available and using them • You do too much – others can do some of the things you do. Let some things go. Delegate to individuals as you do to teams

Leadership Characteristics: The Three Cs

Care



This is probably one of the most neglected characteristics of strong and effective leaders. Good leaders care about the people they lead. What is the purpose in leading if it isn't for the betterment of a body of people? Where it is just for the glory of the leader himself, then that leader will ultimately fall short.

Listening is critical to both the communications and caring nature of the leader. Good leaders are good listeners.

They not only pause often in their communications, but also stop talking and just look, nod, assent with "uh, huh's" and other vocal acknowledgements, particularly when there is conflict, misunderstanding or hostility in the air. Listening is not lip service, but ear service with the eyes.

Caring means knowing names of people, responding promptly, smiling and acknowledging with a nod or touch (careful on the appropriateness of touch) and ultimately hanging out. Tom Peters well-worn cliché of "managing by walking around" is worth remembering. By being out with your people you show you care and

are accessible, while also gaining valuable information.

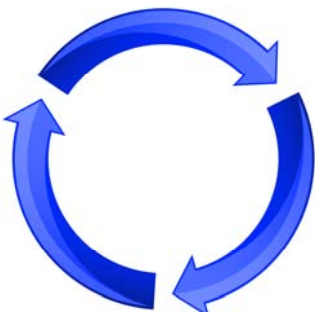
Coaching Caring

Of the three C's, caring characteristics are probably the most difficult to coach leaders in because they are subjective and sensitive. Coaching should only be done by trusted individuals, and the leader must be open to it and fully committed to the principle that caring is important. Then the 3x3 coaching process becomes the most effective.

Here is how a brief written 3x3 might look on a leader who has asked his trusted Vice President of Marketing for feedback:

"Of the three C's, caring characteristics are probably the most difficult to coach leaders in because they are subjective and sensitive. "

	
Keepers	Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send hand written notes on birthdays and events • Very candid in employee open forum sessions • Your natural smile connects with people in casual contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could spend some time out in people's work areas • Often interrupt meetings to answer phone calls • Listen well (through eye contact and nodding) but often finish people's sentences and sometimes interrupt before they finish



Pros Are Always In School

Professional athletes are in training year round. They are continuously improving their game because they constantly get feedback. Coaches and teammates tell them what they're doing and offer specific feedback on what's going right, and how they can improve.

Should we do any less as leaders than be in continuous training?

Coaching leaders should be just like coaching athletes. Using the 3 by 3 coaching model gives a simple system of practical feedback that you can use on a regular basis, and on

any leadership characteristics you choose to emphasize, measure and improve.

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