

Toxic Leadership: Subjectively Refereeing and/or Coaching

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ABSTRACT

The actions of leadership attempting to serve in various roles may yield destructive outcomes. The motives for carrying out the role of leadership can sometimes be toxic. One of many responsibilities of leaders is to lead. However, one needs to be cautious of not leading situations into the wall as opposed to resolution. Often, leaders are 'the' problem or apart of the problem. Let us consider one leader being a political leader (politician) rather than a neutral party. The ineffective leaders with respect to conflict resolution are often the leaders perceiving their role akin a one being both the judge and the jury. The objective of this article is to highlight a toxic leadership challenge often created by leadership. Additionally, to shed some light onto the specifics origins and strategies to avoid such toxic underpinnings of leading. Specifically, acting in the role of referee and coach when one may not be professionally equipped with knowledge and/or experience to do so, objectively and to textbook.

Keywords: Strategy; Coaching; Organizational Development; Strategic Human Resource Management; Management.

COACHING ROLE:

Interestingly, "Sport coaching is as difficult and as demanding as any other aspect of sport" (encyclopedia.com). Placing this cited statement under query applied to leadership deserves some thought. Unarguable, not only in sports, but in business leadership, coaching staff is one of the most important, yet challenging functions. The cite places coaching as challenging as other functions of a particular sport. Noteworthy, we see in sports that coaches come and go, some at their own will, while others terminated. It is not often a coach is terminated if a team is successful. Same theory applies to management/business-successful leaders that move an entity and its stakeholders forward are seldom acquitted of their duties without their own will.

How does one coach succeed with coaching of one player or team in sports while another before was not successful? What does one see and/ or do the other did not. Did perception or respect of the player or team have an effect on the outcomes of coaching/leading? Would the results had they been exactly followed by both the unsuccessful and successful coach differed in outcomes? If so, what other element had control of the outcomes? According to (Witherspoon, 2014), the thinking process of leaders affects their outcomes. Lack of training, experiences, etc. all potentially affect what we 'see' and 'do.' Ultimately, it's deciphering the facts and inferences and optimal functions of coaching as carried out by others that we shall reflect upon and consider in our own practice. Many questions arise when thinking analytically about leading/coaching. Some may consider time or relationship building as critical in coaching/leading. More specifically, the more trust players coaches/leaders have with one another, the better the outcomes. A specific factor this article raises is the need for objective coaching following the specific outcome of refereeing the situation. More discussion will follow on this paradigm.

In leadership coaching, often leaders believe they have all the answers and know how to correct any problem. If this is the case, why do so many professional relationships break down both in sports and/or business? Why do so many 'coaches' (leaders or sports coaches) find themselves being terminated? Could this be an on-going cause (lack of objective coaching) to a rise in other problems and/or break down of professional relationships and mistrust among stakeholders? While trust is critical in building a coaching professional relationship, empathy is also significant, among others (Rekalde, Landeta, & Albizu, 2015).

Is coaching or leadership trainable or is it inherent in an individual? What are the characteristics of some of the most successful coaches in sports or leadership? Among some may be the ability to build relationship and trust with individuals. Ensuring people don't perceive the coach as anything shy of being able to focus on a problem from an objective viewpoint. The viewpoint often comes from an analysis of results or actions. In sport, there are results a player achieves and effects of limitations, such as fouls etc. committed as identified by a referee. From the point, a coach takes the result and plans an action to move the player forward, successful.

A coach or leader is often advised by others; sometimes they act alone in the coaching process. If the person coached lacks professional trust with the coach/leader, the coaching process may be limited. Similarly, coaching as a result of subjective or unfounded results may lead to limited outcomes for all.

Influence of coaching/leading sometimes is by way of others or previous interactions between a coach/leader and a player/associate. This can yield a biased opinion as the two situations may be mutually exclusive. It is sometimes a natural reaction of individuals, either the employee or leader (coach/player) to perceive biased reactions. However, this can be minimized/heeded by way of treating each situation as exclusive, even if it having connections to a prior situation.

REFEREE ROLE:

Dictionary.com defines referee within four different constructs. One of the constructions is defined within the field of law, "a person selected by a court to take testimony in a case and return it to the court with recommendations as to the decision" (dictionary.com). As defined, a referee in this case makes a decision. However, this person does not carry out corrective action support. Their role is to identify a problem and provide a decision to correct. Within the discussions in leadership, one makes a decision as to a problem/its source and then a coach may be able to come and support with correcting the limitation. If the referee were to make the recommendation as to the problem and provide coaching may be perceived as that leader/individual being the judge and the jury. This is not to say the person is not being objective and/or experienced in this role, it's just not common to analyze the entire scenario objectively and then coach. Organizationally, a leader may be the 'judge' or individual identifying the problem and its possible reasoning. Then, it's handed down to an individual whom supports the parties with corrective support. In sport, a referee would call a foul and the coach would support a player to avoid fouls in the future. In business, a leader would identify a limitation and then perhaps a colleague/supervisor may coach that individual toward resolution.

MIXING ROLES (COACH/REFEREE):

When there is objectivity and trust within working professional relationships seldom may either party be concerned about moving forward with support giving receiving based on limitations. However, and unfortunately, this sometimes is rare! Why is it rare one might wonder? Well, human nature sometimes is to build relationships at various levels (trust) with various people; sometimes unconsciously. Example may be working with one individual (coaching capacity or colleague) for years versus not knowing a new individual to coach. This element may unconsciously reveal some degree of biased behavior. One may 'believe' or side with the individual that s/he has known or works closer with as opposed to the individual s/he has not. These types of professional encounters are common. Prejudices, biases, and preconceived notions are among many if not all, whether we admit to it or not. Sometimes it's mere gender or sociological culture or age that plays a significant role.

OBJECTIVIZING THE COACHING PROCESS:

How can one identify and coach an individual, resulting in a win-win situation? One solution is to carefully investigate all sides and scenarios of an alleged problem. Make this known to all involved parties. Better yet, involve a referee to determine the fault/area of limitation and person associated. Then, allow a coach to interfere with a supportive/trusting role of objectively communicating the objective of supporting to correct an area of concern.

Can a judge and jury function in this manner of identifying and providing a solution/sentence for an individual? Sure, they can; however, may it be perceived as subjective/biased? One can answer this for themselves. Specifically, if you're a leader in an organization and someone has brought to you a problem between them and another individual. You know or have had or have a close working professional relationship with one, but not the other, it's almost natural to side/believe one party over the other. Now, can this process be objectivized? Sure. Investigate and be known as a leader that's objective, regardless of time knowing someone. This will then lessen occurrences of individuals bringing a problem to the attention of a leader if it's not a problem and/or stemming from themselves.

Can a coach and referee interact and review a problem? Well, in sport maybe not, but in business, it's wise, when there's a doubt. In fact, it's wise to have a point-person as an investigator of problems and a secondary person as the support provider. Albeit, both parties shall be objective in their respective roles. Handling issues in this manner shall minimize problems and/or objectively support towards a win-win situation for everyone, organizationally.

SCENARIO:

An individual (employee 1) is having a problem with another fellow employee (employee 2). Employee 1 assumes issues and complains to a supervisor. The supervisor hears the story and does not bother to investigate. Moves to writing a correspondence to employee 2 about the allegations and necessities. Employee 2 holds a conference call with the supervisor shedding light and reasons, etc. about the alleged problem. At the conclusion of the call between employee 2 and the supervisor, light was shed as to conclusions yielded, unwarrantedly, both by employee 1 and the supervisor. Later, at the conclusion of a conversation between employee 1 and employee 2 is when employee 1 noted the miscommunicated on their part.

RESOLUTION:

In this example, the supervisor served as both the referee and coach; or, the judge and the jury. In fairness, in some contexts, the person taking the report (supervisor) is charged with serving in both capacities of referee and judge. When in such situations, it's imperative to objectively analyze the situation and allegations, objectively. Then, speak to employee 2, simply noting what's been reported, allowing employee 2 to respond. Finally, analyze both sides of the situation and then hold a meeting (in-person or via telephone) with both employees. At the conclusion of the meeting the supervisor shall listen and take notes for analysis at a later time. Afterwards, if necessary and advisable, go over the brief notes with the supervisor's superior and share an action/coaching plan. Then, cumulatively the results shall be shared with both parties. The party at-fault, shall be then 'coached' as to avoidance strategies. It is especially important to note the party bringing upon the complaint, if found not valid, shall be 'coached' as well as to avoiding such issues in the future. This process shall be communicated (conflict resolution), organizationally with all, so there's no misunderstandings as to the process to follow. Ideally, what every organization may want to support is two people speaking as professionals to one another about an alleged problem and avoiding escalations, unnecessarily. In this example/scenario, employee 1 was the 'problem' and it led to the supervisor being a 'problem' as well. Employee 1 jumped to faulty conclusions and the supervisor bought the story, which led to the facts surfacing later. At the end, it is ultimately about everyone stepping away learning from the situations that take place as no one is perfect.

In some organizations where employee unions are involved may actually mandate a conflict resolution process. In may entail, as an example, one party having a problem is to directly speak to the second party the complaint is against. At that level, should the conflict not resolve, then

representatives become involved from both parties (if separate unions) or one member representing as a mediator. Should it not resolve at this level, then it escalates to the supervisor level for investigation and so on. At the end, there shall be a process to follow that's understood by all. This procedure is clean; promotes communication as the initial stage; and involves hierarchy at a later stage, if necessary. Since union(s) are involved, supervisors/leaders are normally very cautious in due diligence and fact finding to avoid being brought into the problem when found to be taking sides and/or not sufficiently investigating the facts, etc.

DEMORALIZING THE ORGANIZATION/INDIVIDUAL(S):

The critical result of not promoting objective refereeing and coaching is leadership standing to lose trust and respect among the stakeholders. Additionally, more problems existing and one or more members of the organization becoming demoralized. Ultimately, may affect individual performance, which may then trickle down to the stakeholders of the organization.

There should be nothing left to conceal with conflict resolution. Often conflict/problems are promoted to be held confidential in order to possibly promote individuals creating something that possibly never existed and/or maybe been resolvable early on. On average, humans don't welcome conflict and often do not intend to start any, either. However, one may be surprised to find the welcoming of 'confidential' reporting of problems without both parties knowing/speaking about the issue and the possible issues that process may promote. Most conflicts should not be treated/looked at any different than two individuals/friends/family having a problem with one another and discussing it. When concealing a reporting of conflict and avoiding two parties to speak to one another about it, we're actually promoting more possible issues and compromising trust. There may be some select cases where things shall remain confidential; however, a greater percentage of organizational conflicts shall be surfaced and discussed between both parties, to remain objective. In such cases, if there was never a problem or issue and/or something small enough to dissolve on its own or with simple communication, it would not be created into a greater problem.

FORMULA FOR REFEREEING:

While some things in management are objective, refereeing in coaching human subjects may not be. Depending on scenarios, individuals, context, etc. 'rules' may vary. In a particular sport, the rules are standard and applicable to all teams/player; such is not the case with management. Specifically, an effective way to resolve a conflict between two individuals may be dealt with differently by different leaders/referees. Logically, taking into consideration the basic fundamental principles of communication is critical. Otherwise, variances can skew analysis. One combat may be to obtain a knowledgeable, second opinion from another person/source. This shall be very similar to the same as the initial leader. If the two are the same, then it can be perceived as a good indication that some degree of objectivity may be evident. This, of course, may be in accordance to the problem, people, position, etc.

Notably, a coach shall not be the same individual as the referee. Ideally, the referee as noted prior, shall be a neutral individual distanced from 'the problem.' Thereafter, if as a result of the 'referee' noting a challenge outstanding, a coach shall develop a coaching plan to address the situation.

TOXIC LEADERSHIP:

The lack of the following recommendations jeopardizes a leader creating a toxic working environment. Toxic leadership is sometimes known also as destructive leadership (Saqib & Arif, 2017). Such environments may be described as political where certain working relationships are superior to others. Individuals with no fault may become recipients of unwarranted negative character labeling. Lastly, problem(s) still existing and/or the problem(s) that didn't exist really, now do exist because of the process they're handled by supervisors/coaches/referees. At the end, it should not come to whom one likes to take sides of or the first to report is innocent. There should be consideration for leadership that when a problem crosses their desk, it represents an opportunity to showcase their leadership skills in optimally and objectively addressing the issue. Toxic leaders lack consideration for those that report to them (Winn & Dykes, 2019). Ultimately, corporate leadership

shall monitor for the existence of toxic leadership and remove the potential disease (toxic leadership), organizationally (Pathak, 2017).

AVOIDING PLASTIC PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS:

Professional relationships shall not be any different than one with a significant other: honest, sincere, and with integrity. The essence of working professionally is to respect one another all the while of knowing that not everyone may be like yourself. Specifically, one may be introverted, another insecure, while another may be tolerant. We can't always treat others like we would want to be treated as tolerance levels vary across humans. What we can be assured of is if we remain professional in our working relationships and respect one another, we can expect to experience less problems individually and/or organizationally. Additionally, allowing for professional working relationships to form naturally would dispel plastic working relationships, which carry little to no value, overall. As comfortable as one may be in their own home should they be in the workplace, with reason. Further, this is with respect to professional interactions; we shall communicate no different to the various employees within an organization versus interacting with the President of the company—respect shall be given to all. In organizations varied levels of stress exist (Zagross & Jamileh, 2016). A lack of genuine working relationships only creates more challenges for all stakeholders.

What are some characteristics of genuine professional working relationships? One may be taking the time to know about someone, personally and truly. What they may do with their family while away on vacation? Their free time activities, etc. Making genuine connections with those in time of personal support, such as in times of someone who has lost a family member. The relationship shall not be short of a Christian-like, biblically supported professional relationship. Leadership shall note that trust is something very difficult to gain back once it is lost. Same is true of professional relationships amongst staff; easy to build, but if not genuine and lost, they are hard to reestablish, if at all.

CONCLUSION:

Establishing professional working relationships at the workplace shall not be a challenge, given some elementary boundaries and procedures for conflict resolution exist. Additionally, leadership shall consider respective roles and responsibilities and processes for handling issues surfaced. One consideration shall be separating the roles of receiving the complaint vs coaching the individual needing support (refereeing vs coaching). At the end, leadership shall be vigilant not to involve themselves into the either non-existing or existing problem. This may create additional problems for the organization as associates talk to others and word travels fast. Perhaps a training session on interpersonal communication via face-to-face or electronically (e-mail) may be of benefit. The tone of communication in-person or in-writing can be deceiving. While emotional conversations and correspondences may vary, a professionally held conversation, regardless of which type shall be standard.

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