



ONLINE TOOLKIT

Practicing Culturally Aware Coaching

Excerpted with permission from “Coaching Skills for Nonprofit Managers and Leaders: Developing People to Achieve Your Mission”, by Judith Wilson and Michelle Gislason, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services.

Chapter Four of “Coaching Skills for Nonprofit Managers and Leaders” provides a perspective on culturally aware coaching but there is always more to learn, so here we provide additional information about culture, cultural awareness, and the ways culture and values are understood in the workplace. (Special thanks to Prism Coaching, Laurin Mayeno, and Contra Costa Health Services and VISIONS, Inc., for contributing to this section.)

Culturally aware coaching acknowledges a lineage of culture in every human being. How, then, can supervisors obtain the necessary foundation for culturally aware coaching? Although some cultural aspects can be learned by reading or attending workshops, they cannot guarantee the achievement of cultural awareness. This is because cultural awareness is not a distinct skill that can be achieved. It is a lifelong process of trying to “see” from other perspectives or cultural lenses. That being said, this resource offers suggestions and exercises for growing cultural awareness in yourself as an individual and within an organization.

Phase 1 involves participating in programs that help people unlearn racism, sexism, ageism, and other isms in our society. Phase 2 requires examining how culture and values are understood in the workplace. Phase 3 involves understanding the ways that culture affects leadership and is systematized in the governance of the workplace. Finally, we have included guidelines to consider for multicultural interactions.

PHASE 1: STRIVING TO UNLEARN ISMS

Culturally aware coach - managers need to be willing to commit to undoing deeply held assumptions that promote a singular cultural point of view in their lives. This involves engaging in such processes as unlearning racism, dealing with whiteness (understanding how being white gives a person certain automatic rights and privileges), and dealing with internalized oppression (a circumstance in which “an oppressed group uses the methods of the oppressor against itself . . . or starts to believe in nega-

tive stereotypes of itself or its group”, Wikipedia, 2009) in order to prepare oneself for culturally aware coaching. Participating in such training programs helps individuals to prepare for culturally aware coaching and to build an ongoing foundation for that coaching.

How Are Culture and Values Understood in Your Workplace?

Reflect on and discuss the following questions with your peers:

- » What is culture?
- » What is race and what is racism? What are ageism, classism, ableism, and homophobia?
- » How does a coach-manager ask questions that allow a staff member to surface his or her own values?
- » What are the values of the board members and of staff members, and are they conflicting?
- » How do these cultural values express themselves in the workplace? How do they express themselves in the staff members' own cultural worlds?
- » What creates an environment in which cultural competence is mentioned but power dynamics and imbalances, especially racism, are not discussed or addressed?
- » How do coaches ensure that the racism “elephant in the room” is not ignored?

PHASE 2: EXAMINING HOW CULTURE AND VALUES ARE UNDERSTOOD IN THE WORKPLACE

To begin your involvement in Phase 2, complete the following:

How Does Culture Affect Leadership and Get Ingrained in Systems?

Reflect on and discuss the following questions with your peers:

- » How does culture affect leadership?
- » How does culture play a part in the dynamics between the staff, board members, and other stakeholders, including the community and other constituencies?
- » How does culture affect decision making in nonprofit organizations?
- » How does culture affect who has more power and who has less?
- » How does culture affect who is a staff member, a board member, a donor, and a volunteer in a nonprofit?
- » How does culture play a part in the management of an organization between staff leaders and others?
- » What are the characteristics of the dominant leadership style in our society? What are some different cultural leadership styles, and what are their strengths? How do they contrast with the

dominant style?

- » How can raising your awareness about larger social and structural issues—power dynamics, racism, and other oppressions—be of benefit to your work as a nonprofit leader?

Then apply what you have discussed to your own organization:

- » Pull out your organizational chart and perform a demographic analysis.
- » Determine whether there is a history of conflicts between those of different cultures in your organization.
- » Determine whether there are currently issues related to culture between staff and managers in your organization.

PHASE 3: EXPLORING HOW CULTURE AFFECTS LEADERSHIP AND IS INGRAINED IN ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS

To begin your involvement in Phase 3, complete the following:

Guidelines to Consider for Multicultural Interactions

Here are some guidelines for addressing issues of cultural competence, diversity, and inclusion:

Try on new ideas and perspectives, concepts, and experiences. Be willing to open up to new territory and break through old patterns. Remember, “try on” is not the same as “take on.”.

Intent is different from impact. Both are important. We need to own our ability to have a negative impact in another person’s life despite our best intention. In generous listening, if we assume positive intent rather than judging or blaming, we can respond rather than react or attack.

Speaking from the “I” is speaking from one’s personal experience. Rather than saying “we”, using “I” allows us to take ownership of thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Confidentiality is often defined as “what you say in the room stays in the room” and we agree not to discuss what happens in this conversation in a way that would identify any individual. There is another dimension to confidentiality that includes “asking permission” to share or discuss any statement another person makes of a personal nature. It helps to remember that the story belongs to the teller — not the listener.

Both/and thinking means making room for more than one idea and point of view at a time, appreciating and valuing multiple realities—your own and others. While either/or thinking has its place, it can often be a barrier to human communication.

It’s OK to disagree. Avoid attacking, discounting, or judging the beliefs and views of yourself or others—verbally or non verbally. Instead, welcome disagreement as an opportunity to expand your world. Ask questions to understand the other person’s perspective.

Be present. Let go of anything that might be a distraction (deadlines, paperwork, and so on) and be intentional about your purpose in this moment. Bring your full attention to the process. Acknowledge anything that you need to let go of in order to be present.

Listen with respect. Encourage and respect different points of view. Be aware of and respect different ways of communicating.

Listen deeply. Listen with intent to hear beyond the words for the entire content and what is behind the words. Engage heart and mind— beyond “hearing ”. Listen with alert compassion.

Self-awareness. Respect and connect to the authenticity of your true self. Be aware of your thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Be aware of your inner voice and own where you are by asking questions about why you are reacting, thinking, and feeling as you do. Monitor your content, your process, and yourself.

Check out assumptions. This is an opportunity to learn more about yourself and others. Do not “assume” you know what is meant by a communication, especially when it triggers your emotions. Ask questions.

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