



# THE TOP 10 COACHING MISTAKES

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Everyone makes mistakes, even leaders and coaches. I am uniquely qualified to write this article, as I have made every one of these mistakes, some, embarrassingly, more than once. Here are 10 coaching mistakes and how you can avoid repeating them:

- 1. Working too hard.** Most leaders I know are smart, resourceful, talented, and very committed. They have built their careers and, truth be known, their lives working harder than most others. As a coach, this is no longer your job. Your job is to encourage and challenge those being coached to do the hard work.
- 2. Doggedly following a coaching system.** There are lots of step-by-step coaching systems out there, and they have one thing in common: They don't work. Certainly, it can be helpful to think of goals and options and ways forward; however, great coaching conversations rarely follow a pattern. They leap forward, circle back, go deep, change direction—they go wherever the ground is most fertile.
- 3. Not saying what needs to be said.** Great coaching requires courage. The conversations can be uncertain, emotional, and even confrontational. Walk away empty. Finish the conversation knowing that nothing important was left unsaid.
- 4. Neglecting to ask the other person how you can be most helpful.** Unimportant topics quickly evaporate in a good coaching conversation. The great coach always starts with one question: "What's the most important thing we can be talking about right now?"
- 5. Assuming that the other person needs to be fixed.** Even with the best of intentions, it's easy to be drawn into repairperson mode. That's not our job. We all have deficiencies, weaknesses, and flaws. Sure, we may be able to help the other person minimize the negative impact of these characteristics, but our main job is to help them use their natural giftedness to function at a higher level and, in the process, craft a better future for themselves.
- 6. Talking too much.** Most of us love the sound of our own voices. Most of us are quite uncomfortable with extended silence during a conversation. Great coaches understand that silence creates space for reflection and contemplation. They also recognize they can often be most helpful by saying nothing, listening deeply, and allowing the other person to talk through his or her aspirations, dilemmas, and passions.
- 7. Owning the outcome.** We all want to win, and it is natural for us to want credit for our victories. Coaching is different. The person being coached owns all the victories (and failures). When we are at our best, it is not unusual for the person being coached to say "My coach was pretty good, but I really did most of the important stuff by myself."

- 8. Giving lots of advice.** We love to give advice. We sincerely believe that we are being helpful, and it strokes our egos a bit at the same time. Unfortunately, this is a very weak form of coaching. Great coaches severely limit the advice they give, choosing, instead, to do the things that help others gain insight and take action, such as encouraging, challenging, inquiring, confronting, affirming, and questioning.
- 9. Winging it.** A coaching conversation is not intended to advance the interests of both parties; it is all about the person being coached. Great coaches prepare for this conversation by putting aside, temporarily, their priorities, concerns, problems, etc., so they can focus solely on the other person. They also spend time contemplating the other person's aspirations, talents, challenges, and the like so they can make the conversation all about him or her and his or her future.
- 10. Finishing without a commitment.** Great coaching always has two outcomes: insight and action. If something does not change, it's not coaching; it's just an interesting conversation. Always challenge the person being coached to commit to specific actions that will advance his or her cause in a significant way.

It is my hope that the above list will help you identify behaviors and approaches that are currently limiting your coaching effectiveness or, better yet, help you avoid these all together.



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