



EVERYONE NEEDS A COACH: THE KEY TO PEAK PERFORMANCE

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Kevin Sheridan, CEO of 80-employee Rutgers Permanent Painting in Vauxhall, N.J., was considering refocusing his business on selling a new, higher-quality product, yet he was hesitant to take the leap.

What finally pushed him to jump was the coaching of Mark Green at Performance Dynamics Group. Green is one of over 120 global coaching partners we have associated with Gazelles International.

PEAK PERFORMANCE

As Andre Agassi has said, no one can experience peak performance without a coach. Star athletes understand this instinctively. The top leaders at major companies have this support. I'm dumbfounded that most other business people don't.

In Sheridan's case, he knew the new product would be better for his customers—and more profitable for the business. However, to make the change, he'd need to stop doing interior painting and other work that brought in a decent amount of revenue.

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That was hard to do. Sheridan and his executive team almost went back to their old business model three or four times. As Sheridan

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puts it, Green pulled the whole team “screaming” to the other side where they now have no regrets.

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COACHES VS. CONSULTANTS

Every company needs a coach. And whereas consultants are expected to bring answers to tough problems; coaches, in contrast, are expected to ask the tough questions, helping leaders face the brutal facts and uncover the real problems that need solved in the first place.

Coaches also help facilitate decision-making, challenge organizations to perform at a higher level, and hold the whole executive team (including the CEO) accountable.

In addition to a company coach, I encourage each leader to find an individual peer coach, something Marshall Goldsmith, a top executive coach and author, recommends (take a minute and search for Goldsmith’s article on peer coaching).

COMPANY ADVOCATE

In my last column, I discussed how a company can be thought of as a unique living, breathing organism. As such, it needs an advocate—someone on the outside helping the CEO identify what the team can do to help it thrive—and also the ways in which the leadership team is choking off its growth.

Coaches must not be afraid to push your buttons to get to the truth. You’ll know your coach is onto something when you’re so pissed off that you’re ready to fire him or her. Of course, that’s a sign that you’re working with the right person.

You need your coach to hold your team's feet to the fire so they do the right thing for your business as Green did for Sheridan's business.

ACCOUNTABILITY DRIVER

One of the biggest challenges with a growing company is communication, especially when employees are working from eight different locations, as is the case at IMAGEFirst.

The accountability that a coach brings to an organization is one of the most powerful benefits. Ask Jeff Berstein, CEO of IMAGEFirst. His company, based in King of Prussia, Pa., provides medical linen rentals to outpatient medical facilities and other similar customers.

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To address this challenge, the company requires supervisors to hold daily huddles to keep their workers informed and engaged, but, says Berstein, "we weren't always getting it done consistently."

That's where IMAGEFirst's coach, Patrick Thean, Gazelles Systems, has helped. At Thean's suggestion, Berstein began using a point system to track the steps key managers were taking to keep associates engaged, tabulating it weekly.

When supervisors took line workers to lunch, for instance, they'd be asked to snap a photo with the employees and email it in to get points for doing so. They used Gazelles System's Rhythm software to document and publish their weekly progress with dashboards that were shared across all divisions of the company.

"This process allowed us to hold every GM and senior leader accountable across all locations at ImageFIRST," says Berstein.

“A” PLAYERS

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Then also worked with the executive team to put better systems in place for attracting and developing talent, helping them to tap into hiring and interviewing techniques such as Topgrading—something Green helped Sheridan do in upgrading his sales team at Rutgers Permanent Painting.

As a result, over several years IMAGEFirst has increased its percentage of “A” players from 52% to 70%.

“We weren’t going to be able to do this on our own,” says Berstein. “It’s much more effective when you bring in an outside person to keep you focused.” And an outsider can see weaknesses on your team easier than someone on the inside.

Now’s the time to get the company an advocate—a coach that will help you ask the tough questions, drive accountability, and upgrade the talent throughout the organization. It’s one of the most important investments you can make.