

COACHING UP & COACHING DOWN

the
generations

LISA HANEBERG

Coaching Up and Down the Generations

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Alexandria, Virginia



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Acknowledgments

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Introduction



Beyond the Clichés and Worn-Out Talk About Generations

This book is for professionals who want to better catalyze success at many levels of the organization and with colleagues of all ages, persuasions, and hair color. Why did I write it? Let me share with you two uncommon beliefs upon which this book is built:

- The first belief has to do with the essence of coaching.
- The second belief pertains to the challenge of coaching and being coached by people of different ages and experience levels.

I explain these two beliefs just below. But first, a few words of background. Search the Internet and you will find thousands of books, classes, and articles offering suggestions about how to coach people. There are coaching forms, 12-step programs, assessments, surveys, and 360-degree feedback processes. Some of these resources recommend a structured regimen featuring templates for conducting typical coaching conversations. These resources offer valuable information, and most of what I have seen has been technically correct.

So what's the problem? My concern is that many "how to coach" resources are far too prescriptive and miss addressing what I think are the most important aspects of coaching. Great coaching cannot and should not be defined as a set of practices or as a competency.



Author's Aside

If coaching was expressed as a competency, it would have to be called “When asked, help performers with whatever they are up to using whatever means will be most helpful to them and then embrace that you might never know what you did that helped, or if you helped, or when the help became helpful.” I don’t see that description being put into a competency model, do you? How about “agile, service-oriented persistence with a tolerance for the unexplainable and a willingness to go down a path that is not yours, does not interest you, and requires that you buy new shoes to traverse unharmed”?



The essence of coaching is responding to someone who wants coaching in a way that most helps her now or in the future. I define coaching as a developmental conversation *as assessed and requested by the performer*. (As you may have noticed, I am using the terms *coach* and *performer*. I hate the terms *protégé*, *mentee*, and *coachee* because they seem old fashioned and hark back to a time when wisdom came down from on high. *Performer* is not perfect either, but it puts the focus where it ought to be—away from the coach and onto the person with the goal.)

We do not get to say if we are great coaches, and we should not try to call the shots by setting the agenda for each conversation. In fact, coaching is better when we have less control over the conversation. Coaching and control do not blend well at all. (If you, like me, are a recovering control freak, this notion might not sit well with you. Alas, it is true—we really are not in control, and less in control the harder we try to seem so. Join me in recovery, and swim in egalitarian—dare I say service-oriented—waters, letting the tides and currents move you about. You will find it a liberating experience!)

Learning does not ooze from filled-in forms or plop out at the end of any process or regimen. In the 20 years that I have been coaching professionals, I have continued to be surprised to learn what I have done that has made the greatest difference for each individual with whom I have worked. Sometimes I never learn what worked, but I see that she is zooming forward and rejoice in that.

This is my belief about coaching, and I invite you to explore it with me here in this book. You might think that this description will have made it difficult to write about how to coach well, and this is true. I pulled out a few hairs, added more gray ones, and twisted my head around entirely a few times while determining how to be concrete about an ambiguous and seemingly magical topic. It was fun!

Generational Considerations

As you likely surmised from the title, this is a book that merges an exploration of what it takes to be a great coach with how to better connect and communicate with professionals of all ages. Like the topic of coaching, there has been a lot of literature written about the tendencies of the four generations: the Traditionalists, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y or the Millennials. During the last five years, every business conference I have attended has featured presentations on the topic of generational differences. The media has picked up on this, and the phrase “four generations in the workplace” returns more than 80,000 hits when entered in a Google search. (It’s to a point where the most common answer to questions exploring why it is hard to improve our organizations is “Well, we are dealing with four generations in the workplace.”)

As I approached the writing of this book, I had a bit of a personal dilemma because the multigenerational topic seems overexposed. One anecdotal bit of evidence of this is that I was asked by two different program chairs for conferences at which I will be speaking to *not* talk about generational issues. Apparently, we’re tired of the topic!

And yet—and yet, we are not connecting and communicating and helping each other learn like we ought to. We all need to help interested professionals get better, move forward, and obliterate barriers. We should help experienced professionals stay relevant. We should create change-ready organizations in which agility is as common as breathing and changes are received with the same kind of delight we see in people’s eyes when there’s free pepperoni pizza in the conference room.

(This reference might be culturally aimed at North America. Substitute your country's favorite irresistible, nutritionless junk food. That said, the psychoactive effects of the chemicals found in cheap grocery store pepperoni make it quite a unique pleasure.)

If you are young, you have much to share and learn. If you are older, you have much to share and learn. And we know that to be a great coach, you might not have to know anything about any particular topic except how to be helpful—anyone can coach anyone, if the conditions are right.

We might be sick of hearing about the four generations in the workplace, but this is not because we have figured it all out. And maybe that is the wrong goal anyway—I don't think we can or should try to figure each other out. The solution to our lack of understanding, communication, relationships, and collaboration is not reading a book about the four generations or attending a diversity class about them or sitting through a conference speech about them. I think that for us to better work with—affect, communicate with, reach, and influence—people of all ages, we need to change our goals for communication and coaching and change how we define success and our work responsibilities. The approach I recommend is personal and internal, and it will thus require us to give up a few beliefs and replace them with more helpful notions about how we can best contribute to each other and our organizations.

How do we help people who think in ways that are fundamentally different from ours? How will our communication and listening make it through each other's filters and preferences? And more practically, how can we help someone who uses tools and jargon that seem to come from another planet? (This goes both ways, too. We Baby-Boomerasauruses cling to some pretty weird tools, like Skinnerian reinforcement systems, hand-drawn process maps, staff meetings, and \$800 industrial training films.)

Oh, what fun we will have exploring these enigmatic qualities of workplace human relationships and effectiveness! I hope this book is a catalyst for you, and I invite you to jump into the coming pages open to the possibility that they could be game changers for you—as a coach and as a performer.

The Phrase “Up and Down the Generations”

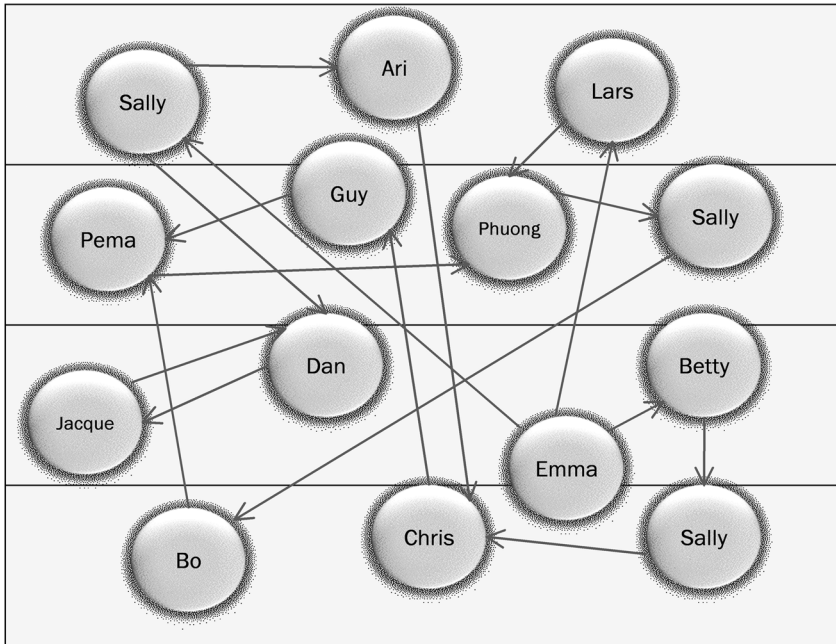
As I’ve suggested above and you will read in the chapters that follow, I want to encourage coaching and relationship building between professionals of all ages. I would like to see 60-year-olds become raving fans of 25-year-olds and 35-year-olds find the time they spend with the 50-year-olds precious and illuminating. I’d like the new college recruit to see how cool the 55-year-old is, and I want the 45-year-old to jump in and love—feeling alive like she has not been for years—being coached by the 21-year-old whiz kid and technology savant. When I write the phrase “up and down the generations,” this is the vision I am sharing. It is not just that each generation learns from each other, but also that there is an electricity present due to the coming together of so many great yet various hearts and minds.

With four generations—Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y or Millennials—working side by side in our increasingly global workplaces, the key processes of transferring knowledge, developing teams, and collaborating have become a bigger challenge. To help organizations build strong coaching and mentoring practices, I created a coaching model and program aimed at helping all employees better learn from each other. This Coaching Up and Down the Generations Network Model of Coaching (see figure 1) stresses how important it is for professionals at all levels, of all ages, and from all backgrounds to connect, collaborate, and learn with and from each other. The coaching program that uses this model addresses the barriers individuals face when they coach, and are coached by, others—especially the challenges related to influencing people who have different beliefs, work preferences, and communication habits. Throughout this book, the specific topics that I explore reflect this model.

A Note on the “He or She” Problem

In each of my books, I have had to decide how to handle the he/she/they issue. Do I write in the plural most of the time—referring to “they” as much as possible? Or do I write “he or she,” “him or her,” and “his or hers”

Figure I-1. The Coaching Up and Down the Generations Network Model of Coaching



Network Coaching: Learning should occur in all directions

Source: MPI Consulting (www.managementperformance.com); used with permission.

a million times? In the old days, it was acceptable to simply use “he” and so on. In this book, I have decided to use “she,” “her,” and “hers” when writing generically about an individual. Why? Because I’m a chick, and I think readers know that the examples apply to all readers. Sticking to one gender helps you, the reader, to easily move through paragraphs, allowing you to focus on their meaning.

What’s Next

In the six chapters that follow, you will find two kinds of practical information—information about what constitutes great coaching, and information about how to get to know each of the four generations in

the workplace. You will also learn how to develop strategies for bringing these two subsets of information together so that you can catalyze more coaching up and down the generations. Here's a rundown of each chapter's focus:

- Chapter 1 clarifies what great coaching is and is not, what it looks like in action, and the impact that coaching ought to have on performers.
- Chapter 2 peeks inside the lives and motivations of the four generations—the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials—so that you can better appreciate and form partnerships with your diverse coworkers.
- Chapter 3 explores the coaching best practices and skills that can help both coaches and performers learn from each other.
- Chapter 4 challenges all readers and performers to improve their effectiveness by becoming more coachable and shares techniques that coaches can use to improve performer coachability.
- Chapter 5 shows how coaches and performers can form partnerships to catalyze breakthroughs and to improve the speed and energy of their progress.
- Chapter 6 outlines several important considerations for creating a work environment where coaching up and down the generations can prosper.

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Chapter 1



Coaching for Catalysts

Fundamentals for Creating Great Coaching Moments

When thinking about what distinguishes great from poor coaching, I remember a conversation I overheard early in my career. I was 20 years old, with an ego that outpaced my accomplishments by a long shot (in other words, I was a normal 20-year-old). I am going to call the performer Jack and the coach Jill. Jack was the controller, and Jill was the front desk manager in the large hotel where we all worked. I was the assistant food and beverage director. Jack wanted to implement a new system for purchase orders, but his ideas were not being received well by the other managers. Jack asked Jill to listen to the plan and help brainstorm ways to make the plan better for all involved. At first, Jill seemed reluctant to comment or criticize, but then she started asking great questions that led Jack to reflect on and share the reasons the other managers had concerns. Jill had her own opinions, but what Jack needed was someone to help him see what he already knew, which was that his plan would not succeed unless he became more flexible and accommodating.

I can remember thinking that if Jack would have asked me for advice, I would have jumped right in and told him what needed to be changed and why—which was not what he needed. Jack asked for and was responsive to Jill's thoughts and questions. Jill resisted giving advice and listened well.

After the coaching conversation, Jack was highly motivated to change his purchase order proposal, and the new plan was well received by the management team. The coaching conversation was brief and effective—yet it was intimate, deep, and provocative.



Author's Aside

Resisting the urge to control people and situations is a huge challenge for coaches and managers. It is most important when coaching and collaborating with others, because success depends on the performer owning her process and results.



Jill used three of the four distinctions that I have selected to describe in this chapter. These distinctions can make a significant difference toward helping you help others. In the pages that follow, I also offer five coaching killers that can reduce your efficacy. But before we dive into the specifics, let's step back and look at the big picture: What's the purpose of coaching? And to begin, let's consider an even more fundamental question: What is coaching?

What Is Coaching?

Coaching is a service that we have the opportunity to provide when performers seek our assistance. It occurs as a conversation that could be done in person, over the phone, in writing, or through other connections. The service of coaching might look like many things, depending on the varying needs and requests of the performer. Sometimes coaching feels like being a scout on a nature expedition—where we are asked to share what we see, hear, and think about something from our vantage point. Coaching might also look and feel like attending a concert, where our main role is to listen and let the performers share their interpretations. Very often, the work of a coach is that of a puzzle master—with our job being to notice the pieces, make observations, and ask questions that help performers bring together their vision, goals, and ways forward.

I just reread the previous paragraph and realize that you might find it frustratingly vague. I don't mean to be obtuse and abstract, but coaching is not a cut-and-dried thing that looks the same every time. Think about the last time when you received great coaching, and reflect on how the conversation started, unfolded, and ended. I would bet that the moment you are recalling was not scheduled in Microsoft Outlook and was not part of a defined and structured coaching conversation.



Author's Aside

I do schedule coaching appointments, by the way. I am not saying that regular coaching relationships are not valid or helpful. My point here is that I think breakthroughs happen because of the quality of the moment and that this is not something that can be planned into an agenda—it must come through deep listening and connection. And even though I might suggest planning questions and “homework” for my coaching clients, I do this not because I think these specific actions are what great coaching is about. The assignments are ways into a conversation that must then take on a life of its own to be of any use.



Like snowflakes, every coaching moment is unique. Here's the bottom-line definition: Coaching is a developmental conversation requested, welcomed, and driven by the performer that enables her to better achieve her goals.

What Is the Purpose of Coaching?

On the basis of my definition of coaching, its purpose should be clear—coaching needs to help the performer move forward in some small or big way. Great coaching fuels performers with inspiration, new ideas, clarity, shortcuts, focus, knowledge, or some combination of these types of progress.

Coaching is very cool work, and I cannot think of a better way to spend time with a fellow professional. I get a rush of satisfaction when something I say or do enables a performer to zoom toward her goal with velocity (by

velocity, I mean speed and direction; when people move toward goals with velocity, they progress with an oomph that is wonderful and that imbues their work with energy). Think about the last time you catalyzed a breakthrough—wasn't that fun? And it is a privilege to be able to have an impact on others at work. If I look back on the previous month, one of my most memorable moments was hearing from a coaching client who said she felt amazing, on the right track, and confident. During our first coaching session, she reported feeling like a failure, stressed, and unable to figure out what to do differently. Something wonderful happened in a very short period of time to change her performance trajectory, and I feel honored that she invited me into the conversation to participate and help. Being there for her—whatever that meant—was my purpose as her coach, and this is the purpose of all coaching: to be there to help.

Four Distinguishing Characteristics of Great Coaching

With these definitions in mind, let's explore a few fundamentals that tap into the art and science of coaching—with a nod to chaos theory. These distinctions can help you create productive conversations with performers:

- pull-versus-push coaching
- coaches as catalysts
- the coach's sponge stance
- accountability and structure.



Author's Aside

Human systems share some of the characteristics of chaotic systems. In chaotic systems, like the weather, the outcome cannot be predicted, and there is a sensitivity to initial conditions—meaning that current conditions are affected by an earlier condition that is not known or fully understood. Thus, coaching conversations can be directionally correct, well intended, and logical, but because they are part of human systems, they still may not produce the results we predict.





Would You Like to Know More About *Coaching Up and Down the Generations*?

Why would anyone provide workplace coaching? Because it allows you the satisfaction of saying or doing things that enable another person to achieve his or her goals. *Coaching Up and Down the Generations* presents the fundamentals of coaching, including topics such as push versus pull coaching, acting as a catalyst, learning how to listen, and providing accountability and structure. And because communication is a central feature of coaching, this book focuses on the opportunities and challenges presented by a workforce characterized by multiple generations. Lisa provides an entertaining overview of how differently the generations experienced their formative years and how these differences affected the ways they think and express themselves. The book explains how to roll this knowledge into the practice of coaching to enable people of any age to achieve extraordinary results.

About Lisa Haneberg

Lisa Haneberg is nonfiction writer, speaker, and consultant with 25 years' experience in management, leadership, and personal and organizational success. She is the vice president and OD practice lead for MPI Consulting, a consulting firm headquartered in Cincinnati, OH. She consults in organization development, management and leadership training, and human resources and has worked for and with several *Fortune* 500 companies.

Lisa has written 10 books, numerous articles and essays, and authors the popular management blog, Management Craft at www.managementcraft.com. She lives with her husband, two big dogs, and two cats in Cincinnati, Ohio. She enjoys travel, reading, writing, and driving her purple motorcycle named Hazel down winding roads. Feel free to contact Lisa through her website www.lisahaneberg.com.

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To learn more, visit the Coaching Up and Down the Generations webpage at www.astd.org/coachingupanddown.