



Build Your Business

An eNewsletter for
CEOs looking to
grow their companies.

High-value, "how-to" articles on customer-attraction, sales development, leadership, and best-practices in HR, IT, product development, communication, financial operations, engineering and M&A/value creation.

How to be Coachable... as a CEO

Three easy behaviors you can try out that will (1) make you more coachable, (2) boost your personal performance, and (3) help you coach your own direct reports.

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How to be Coachable as a CEO

What is coaching, and how can you become more coachable – and in the process, grow your personal effectiveness, and enhance your ability to be a coach to your direct reports? Coaching is a mindset where you empower the other person, envision them as you know they could be, and help them see themselves in a new way.

Beyond the cliché' of “coaching”

There's been an explosion in the use of the word “coaching” - you can find a coach for everything from your golf swing to your relationship with your cat. Yet for a CEO, *nothing is more effective* at unlocking your potential like the right coach. Coaching is the number one thing you can take on to help yourself AND your bottom line.

You've already been coached

Most CEOs have actually been coached a lot – and many don't realize it.

Who were your best bosses or favorite leaders?

Odds are, they were the ones who believed in you even more than you believed in yourself. They pushed you to grow. They even made you uncomfortable in the process – and over time, you thanked them for it. In fact, you wouldn't be a CEO today without that person's input.

[Susan Steinbrecher](#), founder of the leadership and coaching firm Steinbrecher and Associates and author of [Heart Centered Leadership](#), asks: “Why was that person your favorite?” She has asked this question of thousands of people, and always gets these same answers. no matter what sort of group she asks – it could be a “C-Suite” group of senior executives, or a group of front line workers and supervisors. The answers are always that the favorite leader:

- mentored me
- coached me
- believed in me
- empowered me
- trusted me
- valued me
- cared about me as a person

Consistently, we like and admire the boss who challenged us, believed in us, cared about us, and helped us grow. And in return, we wanted to not let that boss down, wanted to go the extra mile, wanted to live up to the high expectations and high opinion of this boss. We were motivated to work our very best.

And it's always this same list of characteristics.

The point is – coaching got you where you are today, even if you called another name, like 'mentoring' or just 'having a good boss.'

In order to be coachable, you have to be willing to enter back into this sort of relationship, even though you don't have a boss any more. You have to be willing to take on a “make me uncomfortable – help me grow” attitude. And you have to find the person who can and will do that for you.

Small coaching shifts create big results

One of my recent coaching clients had spent 20 years as a top-down authoritarian leader. In the course of a few weeks of coaching, he was able to try out an entirely new way of being – he asked his employees to tell him what the major problems with the firm were, and had them create their own work groups to tackle those problems. He struggled against his old behaviors and truly gave the new ones a try – and the results were astounding. Morale shot up. One brand new employee said “If this is how we do things here, I never want to leave. This is the best place to work ever.”

His five work groups brought out of his people more creativity, initiative and drive than he thought possible. As he put it: “Never before has this company had the direction, focus and total commitment from all players. Each employee had an actual say in what areas we needed to improve, how the improvement should be implemented and the time lines determined for completion. Today we have been able to make changes that affect each employee with out fear of fall out because we included them in the processes.”

In just two months, the firm experienced (as the CEO wrote) “amazing results... immediate increases in efficiencies, profitability and cost control.”

Unlocking his people's potential paid off – and it started because this CEO was willing to try a specific personal change in approach and attitude.

How do you coach a CEO – is it different from coaching someone else? How?

Susan finds that sometimes people resist the idea of a CEO getting coached, because they think the CEO should already be perfect. This is bizarre. It may also reflect a certain wishful thinking – we want the CEO to have all the answers and so we may pretend he does, in order to comfort ourselves, and we may then resist anything that might shake that imaginary comfort.

And some CEOs have a hard time embracing the humility that is required to admit that there's room for growth. They don't realize that there is greater strength in humility and vulnerability.

What makes a person coachable?

To be coachable you have to take your part of the relationship very seriously. You have to block out sacred time that is only about the coaching work. You have to be present, not try to multitask. You have to want to grow. You have to be open to new information. And ultimately you have to do the work.

What makes the coaching relationship unique?

The coach may be the only person a CEO works with whose only agenda is that CEO's success. Subordinates are thinking about their own careers. Investors and board members are thinking about the profitability of the firm. A spouse wants the CEO to come home occasionally. The coach has no other goal than to help that CEO become better.

How can I pick a good coach?

Don't play it safe. This is someone who will help you grow. When you're interviewing potential coaches, look for experience and training and certification, and also look for that spark that tells you this person can challenge you and inspire you to get out of your comfort zone. Be prepared to enter into a one-year, non-cancelable contract.

Coaching your Direct Reports

Now that you've remembered the people who helped you grow, you can emulate their best behaviors with your direct reports. Are you solving problems for them? Stop it - push your people to solve them, while you support and guide them. Are you mentally picturing your people as unable to grow? Shake that off and picture them - vividly - as having enormous untapped potential. By visualizing it, you'll start to behave as if they had it, and your belief will become infectious.

And as you work with your coach, you'll naturally find yourself copying their more effective techniques when you step into the coaching role with your direct reports.

Face the challenge and make it happen

You got where you are through coaching. It'll get you to your next level, too - if you can shrink your ego, find a good coach, and empower them to push you.

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Author's Biography

Tom Cox is a successful consultant, author and speaker. He has worked in industries ranging from retail to wholesale to manufacturing to government to business services. He has worked at IBM, Oracle, TRM, Tektronix, SCIF, ODOT, Intel, Regence Blue Cross, Standard Insurance, OHSU and dozens of others.

Tom's volunteering includes the City Club of Portland, where he serves on the Board of Governors.

Tom is the author of one book, countless articles, and he co-authored the chapter on Metrics and Performance Improvement for a textbook on Medical Trauma Care. Starting in 2010 his column runs twice a month in [Oregon Business Magazine's](#) online edition.

A graduate of the University of Chicago, Tom earned his four-year degree in psychology in just three years, with honors.



Additional insights and value from leading authorities in their areas. Articles in the January, 2011 publication:

How to Attract Significantly More Customers

Mark Paul

Do you have all the customers you need? Are you open to new ideas and ways of looking at customer-attraction? If so, you will want to read this article.

Don't Be Blindsided By Financial Risks

Patrick Wheeler

What keeps you up at night? Have you been surprised by financial hiccups? This article shares six steps and a case study to help you mitigate financial risks - to help you grow your business.

Create High-Performance Teams

Tom Cox

Some CEOs don't need coaching because they are perfect. For the rest, this article discusses reasons why to embrace coaching, how you've already done it, and how to do it even better.

How to measure the business value of technology - Scorecarding

Manoj Garg

Do you know if you are truly getting value from your IT investments? Is it difficult to articulate IT's value in your organization? Learn how you can use the IT Value Calculator to figure out how well IT is performing.

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Dave Yewman

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Sales Strategy-the Most Critical Element of Corporate Strategic Planning

Bill Etheredge

Are revenues tracking to your annual plan? Are you constantly looking for that elusive "world class" sales executive? This article shares how you can boost sales by integrating sales with your strategic planning.

The Urgent Role of HR in M&As

Iris Sasaki

Fully 70% of M&As fail to create shareholder value. It is crucial to look at all the possibilities that lead to success.

Paralysis by Analysis: How Development Schedules Slip

Mike Miles

Several factors contribute to schedule problems. Recognizing when it's happening, and acting to minimize the effect are explored in this article.

Finding the Street Value of a Privately Held Company

Brent Freeman

Maximizing your company's value requires knowing how the market values closely held companies. This article deals with a straightforward method that CEOs and owners can use to find the "Street Value" of their company.

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Gary Chin

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