

Why teams accomplish MORE with a great coach...and why you should REALLY be using one

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Do you remember being on a sports team when you were younger?

It could have been on a baseball, football, soccer or even a swim team. It was fun just to be out there playing hard to win the game. You might not have known all the rules or even known how to play the game correctly, but you were excited to participate. You probably experienced times of confusion or frustration trying to learn the game. That was just normal. It was all new to you. The one thing you did know for certain was your coach was right there with you to help explain the game and lead the team.

A coach is someone who can get everyone on a team to play together to reach a common goal. This is not an easy task. It requires an in-depth understanding of the game and the ability to relate to the team members. Interpersonal skills are just as important as technical knowledge. It also requires the ability to motivate, lead, teach and hold others accountable for their actions. Given these essential coaching skills, there are good and bad coaches. You could probably name some of your previous instructors who would fit into these coaching categories. Then there are GREAT coaches.

Proven Model: Great coaches get results

A great coach is someone who changes the current culture by overcoming incredible obstacles. It could be a long losing streak or a lack of team talent. A great coach focuses on changing the mindset of the team. He/She gets the team to believe that they can achieve the unachievable. It starts by defining a plan for adjusting the team's behaviors. In order to change the current direction, a new path must be laid. There will be growing pains and the team will struggle at first. There will be numerous frustrations and failures along the way. But then something amazing happens.

Soon their understanding of the game starts to grow. Their techniques continually improve. As a result, their performance improves as well. The team is able to move faster and produce at a higher level. Their focus starts to center around execution because they have mastered the fundamentals. They have learned for themselves how to become proficient in their abilities

and work effectively with others. The team has worked hard to build confidence in themselves and those around them that they can reach their targeted goals.

The team has grown to become results-oriented and is better able to handle new challenges with the same successes. Before long, others start to see their remarkable transition and accomplishments they have accumulated. They start to crave the same results for their own team. They want to duplicate a thriving culture for themselves. You see this all the time in professional sports. They look around for these types of people...GREAT COACHES.



"Great Coach" Icon:

Vince Lombardi (Green Bay Packers, Head Coach 1959-1967) led the team to five league championships in just nine years. Lombardi is legendary for his coaching philosophy and motivational skills. He expected the utmost performance from his team by emphasizing hard work and dedication.

Building *not-so-perfect* IT Project Team

How do you put together your project teams today? Do you do your due diligence by taking adequate time to look for the best resources by soliciting referrals from your peers or searching through talent pools for highly qualified candidates? Or do you just get whoever is available at the time to meet your critical need?

Let's say you do get the best and brightest resources to staff your project team. You feel confident in their specialized skills. You hire a project manager with lots of experience. Next, you find a business analyst who knows the business domain. You bring on a group of solid developers who know the new technologies and system testers with a great reputation. Your team is set. They are off and running. Everything is going smooth at first. You feel the team is making great progress. After awhile, their progress starts to drop off. They start to miss deadlines. Maybe they offer excuses for not being able to deliver on the intended solution. What just happened?! I thought I put together the "perfect team".

Does this sound familiar? It happens frequently in the software development world. We had the right players or resources on the team. What did we forget? Oh yeah...we forgot the key resource who is strictly focused on the team's performance to ensure they get the right

desired results throughout the lifecycle of the project. We forgot to put a coach on the team.

Why can't the team just *coach* themselves?

Think about it. A professional sports team is made up of highly skilled athletes who are very capable of doing their job effectively. They are typically the best in the world. That is what makes them professionals. But could you imagine a professional team without a coach?

Of course not. You could probably guess what would happen. It would be a team of individuals all trying to do it their own way. More than likely, they would not play together as a team. Different motives, different focuses. The result would be chaos. The team needs the coach-figure who is responsible for leading and teaching the team to play together to do much more than they could do individually.

So why do we treat IT Project Teams any differently? They are also made up of highly skilled professionals. They are also very capable of doing their job effectively. But have you ever noticed an IT Project Team working independently? There is lots of work going on, but no cohesiveness. The team starts to lose its focus. Soon the project is behind schedule. Or worse, the project is in jeopardy of being cancelled. That's exactly why an IT Project Team also needs a coach.

Doesn't the *project manager* play role of coach?

Not really. The project manager is just one of the members of the team. They have their own specific role and responsibilities on the project. They are accountable for the scheduling, resourcing and financials of a project. They are not typically skilled in all of their other disciplines on the project team. They can help address issues and risks impacting the other disciplines, but they don't necessary focus on the performance and techniques of the other team members. That's where a coach would come into play.

Does the coach perform project work?

No. The team is responsible for performing the work on the project. They are the ones who are *playing the game*. They are the specialized professionals or athletes who are called upon to accomplish the project tasks.

The coach is the one who responsible to get the team to perform together as a well-trained, cohesive unit. It's the coach who monitors performance, seeks out areas for improvement, teaches new techniques and makes the adjustments all the way to help the team reach their goals. What makes a project team successful is not defined by number of skilled resources on the team, but how well the team can quickly adapt to the changing

environment. This is the true value a coach can bring to a project team.

Statistics show: Coaching continues to grow

In order to be successful in the marketplace, companies must be able to grow and retain their staff. Companies rely on the development of new ideas and solutions. The traditional way to grow the staff's knowledge has been to send them to training classes to acquire the latest skills. Unfortunately, studies show that traditional training dollars have a minimal impact on the bottom line. The skills learned in a classroom setting don't always translate into effective usage on real projects. As a result, companies are now looking for new and innovate ways to get more for their money.

Many companies are turning to coaching to help guide their new projects and facilitate problem-solving sessions. When their staff members are able to work on projects with an expert by their side, they are better able to learn and quickly apply new techniques. On-going repetition and real-time feedback leads to a stronger foundation of knowledge. In addition, an outside perspective can offer fresh ideas and approaches to quickly attacking common problem areas.

In the *Coaching: The Fad that Won't Go Away* article by **Fast Company** (July 8, 2008), studies showed an increase in the use of coaches. An outstanding 56% of the companies contacted indicated they would focus on coaching as their major learning method. Over the next five years, 63% of the organizations say they plan to increase their use of coaching. Of the participants already being coached, 92% say they plan to continuing using coaches on their projects. In many other studies, companies have reported an impressive 500-700% Return on Investment (ROI) for their coaching dollars.

This is exactly what companies are looking for. They want sound investments that allow their staff to quickly and adaptively build quality products and solutions. Which leaves the question...*"Are you ready to get a coach on your team?"*

About the Author

Chad Swierczek is the Executive Director at Requirements Coach, LLC. Requirements Coach (www.RequirementsCoach.com) focuses on helping project teams become more successful at developing and managing software requirements during the course of the project by quickly identify areas of improvement, teach easy-to-understand techniques and then personally helping to implement the techniques to increase the team's performance.