

**February 20, 2008**  
**Dr. Laurie Anderson**

### **The Secret to Great Coaching**

One of the more popular tips I share with leaders relates to how they can become a fabulous coach. Easily. And starting right now.

Before I spill my trade secret, let me state clearly: There is more than one way to think about, and to deliver, great coaching. Identify what approach works best for you and be sure you provide what works best for those you serve.

But if you're not lovin the coaching you're getting or giving, read on.

Let's start with defining the 'what' and 'why' of coaching. In my view, coaching is specific guidance provided in order to improve someone's capacity and enthusiasm to contribute more of what is needed, today and tomorrow.

And where good people become confused, in my view, is that they equate coaching with providing feedback.

To illustrate what I mean, imagine the final minute of a highly competitive sport event. The score is tied. Time out is called. What are the coaches telling their players in the few seconds they have with them on the side lines? Are the coaches pointing out the mistakes that led to the tie score? Are the coaches throwing up their hands and asking for input on what play to run? Are the coaches hoping to end the time out on a depressing note?

The coaching goals here are two-fold: give the team the play; fire them up to execute the play.

That's it.

After the game is over, there is likely to be some post-game review. The 'feedback' what the players/ team/ coach should have, could have done, is key to learning how best to compete against future opponents. And if the players leave a little downtrodden, they have time to recover before the next showtime moment.

Now, let's move back to our business context.

I would argue that there are 'game time coaching moments' and there are 'post game' review moments. Leaders: assess what you want to achieve and then choose your approach accordingly.

Before: Ask yourself:

Do you want to teach a 'new play'? Do you want the coachee to walk away excited? If yes, then coach.

Do you need to have a post-game review moment for performance management purposes, ie to ensure that the employee hears clearly that they fell short of expectations?

Feedback	Coaching
Feels bad but is necessary	Fires you up
Shows you who you were	Shows you who you can be
Points out a behavior that didn't work	Gives you a 'new play' to try
You want to limit these conversations	You want to have more of these conversations

Many people confuse coaching with giving feedback. But they are very different. Giving feedback is looking backward, telling your staff what they did wrong, and providing criticism --- albeit helpful criticism, but criticism nonetheless. Even high-performers walk away feeling corrected, depressed, like they've done something wrong.

Coaching, on the other hand, looks forward. It's about improving an individual's capacity for contribution. It's about seeing not what your workers are right now ---- but rather what they can be.