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To Assess Or Not To Assess?

The potential power of assessments in leadership coaching

There is an ancient saying inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi attributed to the great Greek philosopher Socrates (469-399 BC). That saying is “Know thyself.” Socrates knew that we must first understand ourselves in order to be truly wise.

In today’s language, we call this self-knowledge self-awareness. Self-awareness is a solid place to start since for most coaches, our purpose is to assist our clients in moving from ‘where they are’ to ‘where they want to be.’

‘Where they are’ means having an accurate self-assessment of their strengths, preferences, motivations, and passions as well as their areas for growth and development. Since we all have our blind spots, assessment tools can increase our clients’ self-awareness.

The Positive Power of Assessments in the Workplace

To assess or not to assess as a coach is a great question to ask. Since my area of expertise is executive leadership coaching and employee engagement, that lens informs my perspective. When properly used, it is my position that any number of assessment tools can be a powerful catalyst to help give people the opportunity to bring their whole selves to work.

Imagine the benefits of truly connecting who you are with what you do. Through these tools we can help our clients understand the things that make work easy and joyful. We can also help confirm for them the things they might be better off delegating, outsourcing, or even avoiding altogether if possible.

It doesn’t stop with just an understanding of the self, either. Many assessments can be used to better understand and connect with others. Interpersonal relationships can be improved through communication, team dynamics can be improved through trust and teamwork, and employee engagement and productivity can dramatically improve an



organizational culture, which ultimately results in greater productivity and better financial results

Why Assessments Can Supplement Good Coaching

1. People Thrive Within An Organizing Framework

Remember *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*? This book, written by Dr. Stephen Covey, has remained on the best-seller lists for decades. In the 25th anniversary edition, Jim Collins of *Good to Great* fame wrote in the introduction, “Covey created a standard operating system – the “Windows” for personal effectiveness and he made it easy to use.” In other words, he created a framework with the 7 Habits. Likewise, a good assessment with an elegant, easy to understand model can provide an organizing framework to guide more effective behavior.

As a leadership coach, my primary objective in working with clients is to assist individuals, teams, and organizations to create a healthy, engaged culture where people want to

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come to work and give their best. This process begins by helping their leaders to become more self-aware.

My tool of choice is the original DISC model, a personality/behavioral style assessment that helps individuals to determine a person's naturally effective and ineffective traits in relationship to the needs of a particular situation. Understanding the profile in depth helps me guide coaching clients to better manage their tendencies by building and capitalizing on their natural strengths, mitigating their limitations, and managing their areas for growth.

I recall taking my first DISC assessment in my '30s and wondering why I hadn't learned about this earlier! I walked away with greater clarity and insight into why I was motivated by some tasks and clearly stressed by others. Understanding the DISC profile also gave me a sense of how to identify the behavioral tendencies and needs of others so that I could learn to speak to them in their language. Rather than assuming that others would like to be approached and motivated in the same way I would, I learned how to adapt by crossing the bridge into the other person's world. Even the mere willingness to do so often results in greater trust, rapport, and ultimately better teamwork and effectiveness.

2. People Don't Tend to Argue with Their Own Data

Assessment tools can serve to provide feedback in a more objective, replicable manner. Information generated from a valid and reliable tool feels less personal and is often more easily digestible than verbal feedback that can be colored by subjective feelings.

The information the client receives back feels more real since they provid-

Overcoming Fears

Why would people be afraid to assess, and what to do about it

- 1** Perceived risk such as fear of lack of privacy or lack of fairness – introduce the assessment process positively and educate people about its value over time. A lack of fairness can be addressed by using “the right tool for the right job.”
- 2** Lack of expertise or support – be sure you understand what the assessment does and does not measure and administer and interpret it accordingly with qualified people. Become properly trained to use the tool to best serve your client base.
- 3** Cost – most assessments, if administered and interpreted professionally, add much more to the client experience than their cost.
- 4** Confusion about types of assessments – this relates to the “right tool for the right job.” There are assessments for many purposes including pre-hire selection, individual development and coaching, team development, succession planning, and career planning to name a few. Likewise, the different types of assessments can fall into the categories of skill, cognitive, 360 or multi-rater, personality or behavioral style assessments.

The best way to navigate through the potential confusion regarding various assessment tools is to first be clear about the outcome you are seeking to achieve. The second important step towards clarity is to understand the validity and the reliability of the tool you are using. Validity simply refers to whether the assessment measures what it is designed to measure while reliability relates to whether it does so consistently over time and for all participants.

ed the input that generated the output. Some of the inevitable biases and prejudices of working with others who see the world differently are removed in the interpretation helping everyone to work together more effectively.

Even in the case of a multi-rater or 360 degree feedback process where the client asks for input from others, the feedback report can provide a coaching client with a more objective, concrete map of where they are and where they want to go.

3. Scientific/Statistical Valid Instruments Provide Validation and Confirmation of Where to Begin

Last, once a coaching client receives their results and these are

properly interpreted for them by a qualified coach, the results can bring a sense of relief. It is always helpful to understand why things are the way they are. We humans like reasonable explanations for our own behavior and for the behavior of others. The feedback reports from most assessments can serve as a roadmap for where the greatest leverage points are in the coaching process.

In my experience, assessments can help people gain greater insight into what they need to be more successful, productive, and fulfilled at work. What a gift it is to provide a means for people to more fully embrace and understand their gifts, talents, strengths and opportunities. ●