

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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WHY COACH?

Do you know where the word “coach” comes from? We so typically associate the word with athletics that the quickest answer is that it probably derives from the world of sports. But “coach” actually has its origins in the world of transportation (which, oddly enough, contains the word “sport” within it). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a “coach” was originally a noun meaning something like this: “a vehicle for transporting people to a destination they cannot easily reach by themselves”—as in a “coach & six” (that is, a stage coach with 6 horses).

If you think about what the word coach has come to mean today, the linkage back to this original meaning makes a lot of sense. For what does a good coach—a football coach, a career coach, a “life” coach, or even a marketing coach—aim to achieve if not to guide someone to some place he or she cannot easily reach all by himself or herself? When it comes to brand-building and marketing, more often than not the coach is really trying to get an entire team of people to some place—like a higher level of performance—they might not be able to get to on their own.

When we share this original notion of coaching with our clients, they naturally appreciate the role of good coaching in sports and careers, but sometimes remain skeptical about the role their own coaching can play in getting better results: better strategies, better creativity, better ideas for their brands. So we’ve begun highlighting some of the reasons why coaching matters in marketing:

- 1. You coach to get people to *want* to listen to what you have to say, to make it clear to them that you are *adding value* and not merely being critical of their work.** So many times in our marketing efforts we are confronted with a team of highly experienced creative folks—package designers, promotion developers, sponsorship promoters, advertising and rich media content creatives—and are expected to respond to their ideas. When we talk about what we see in their work that we like and can be built upon, rather than about what we don’t like, we’re coaching and...we get people open to listening. They may not always fully agree with the direction we’re proposing, but more than likely you’ll have a productive dialogue all the same. No one (including us marketers) likes to hear about “what’s wrong” with our work; our natural response to “what’s wrong” is to stop listening--so we can formulate our defensive responses.
- 2. Along these same lines, you coach to be more *productive* with your time and resources.** Because in coaching you always start with an overall assessment of the entire work (as opposed to zeroing in on some small piece that “sticks in your craw”), you immediately draw your listeners’ attention to the bigger picture. They do not waste time or anxious energy trying to figure out where you’re heading; the overview makes it real

clear what work within the entire body they should focus on, and what work they can put on the back-burner. And because you are also leading with things you have heart for and not leading with things that are driving you crazy, you are saving time by pre-empting what otherwise would be defensive arguments back and forth.

3. **You coach, quite simply, to get smart people *solving problems* for you.** Whatever aspect of the business we come from, each of us first and foremost likes to think of ourselves as problem-solvers. We take pride in letting our bosses and team-mates know that we are ready to take on a challenge. Our creative agencies are especially keen to let us know this—in fact, it is not uncommon to see in many agency creative briefs a section that reads something like, “What is the problem that the _____ must solve?” Call it empowerment, if you like, but the real psychic rewards in business come from being one of the “solution bearers.” Good coaching always finds a way to put the challenge back into the hands of the players.

4. **But perhaps most of all, you coach to *motivate others to reach even higher*.** One of our favorite old TV commercials (for United Airlines) features a college football coach at halftime. He is shown pushing his players hard, putting them on the spot about their individual performances so far and asking the why they continue to fall short. At one point, one of the players looks up and asks, “Coach, aren’t we ahead by 21 points?” To which the ever-reaching higher coach retorts, “Now you see that. When we’re satisfied as a football player, we’re finished as a football team.” Like many of our creative resource teams, this fictitious football team is performing well so far...but how much better might they still be? And, even more importantly, who knows what the competitors might do to up-tick their performance in the future? One sidebar to this notion of coaching to motivate: while it’s generally true that any performer, no matter how gifted, can probably reach yet another level; it’s also true that acknowledging already high levels of performance is an excellent motivator in itself. Said another way, it’s fine to urge the team onwards, but don’t overlook the value of amply praising the successes already achieved.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

For this week’s B&H, we offer a checklist of some tried & true coaching principles:

- _____ **View the glass as half-full.** Look for what’s promising and build on that.

- _____ **Lead with an overall assessment of the progress.** Don’t “think out loud; frame the direction you want the team to take.

- _____ **Don’t talk about what you see that you don’t like; talk about what you don’t see that you would like to see.**

- _____ **Structure your comments to get people solving things.** (Such as, “How can we get more competitive still in the benefit-dramatization?”

- _____ **Direct, don’t execute.** Cite the principle, the concept you seek.

_____ **Seek “shots on goal.”** Aim to get as many creative options for a particular strategy as you can.

_____ **When work is good, be generous with praise.** (Think about what YOU would like to hear when you know your work is darn good.)

_____ **Summarize the steps you need done next.** (Or ask the resource team to play back what they will work on next.)

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