

Presenting symptoms in coaching engagements and the substance of a coaching dialogue

Tough times make coaching leaders especially demanding. Their visibility makes them exposed and vulnerable, which means that real leadership can be a lonely and high-pressure place. They focus on short-term challenges, but also focus on the future.

Strong leaders view difficult times as those when development is needed most—when nurturing and retaining talent offers a competitive advantage in the long term, when shifting day to day activities to others is developmental and greater focus is required on strategic imperatives.

Given the pressures they face, various symptoms may surface. Example:

Are they, “burnt out, wearing down, frustrated,” “recycling old solutions to current problems,” or “I’m wondering how I got to this position; I don’t feel comfortable in it.”

This is where leaders require ultimate trust in the coaching relationship. Coaching leaders will almost certainly touch upon how tough they are mentally. Most coaching engagements present four key areas that drive the coaching content:

- Capacity – thriving on pressure, leaders can be invigorated by the pressure of the job, but pressure can also be debilitating even overwhelming if not addressed. Achieving balance in functional capacity, team building, and drive; essential for balance is mindset, the key factor in how a leader responds to pressure. Seeing sources of pressure as opportunities and challenges rather than threats or constraints is the key to thriving in today’s environment.
- Interpersonal skill factors, and ability to influence effectively, develop followership, self-management, dealing well with conflict and, preserving a high level of motivation
- Emotional regulation; staying centered managing self while believing in one’s abilities, given the business climate and the forces that challenge the client
- Individual and team performance – leadership, focusing on what matters- what encourages or discourages performance in the work environment, delivering results

Alternatively, some leaders are driven so much by their needs for reward, status, and power that they are unwilling to put themselves on the line because of the threat of losing their position if they take the wrong action. They keep their heads out of the firing line, they are risk-averse, and they will sit tight in the hope that more favorable conditions are just around the corner.

Indicators include, little or no innovation and challenge to orthodoxy during a leader’s tenure since his/her focus is almost exclusively on micromanaging the short term—particularly around items such as achieving this week’s numbers. In tough times, the focus is on cutting costs and probably putting a halt on development activities such as coaching. Ironically, that’s just when it makes the most sense to invest in development.