

## **Coaching in Sports Vs. Coaching in Business**

Last month, I had the unique pleasure of being both a volunteer and spectator at the Wells Fargo Championship in Wilmington, North Carolina.

As a spectator, I, of course, **got to watch many of the world's best golfers in action. But in** my role as volunteer, I got a behind-the-scenes look, so to speak, at how the pros prepare. I helped out during the tournament at the Practice Tee, where we had various tasks to complete: picking up balls from the range, then sorting and bagging them so players could **use them to practice, setting out players' name plates, and responding to different player** and caddy questions.

Because I and all the other volunteers moved around the practice facility so much, we were able to see the players up close. Some, like Phil Mickelson, brought along a coach to the practice tee. Many players had a variety of practice aids - guides, trays and tees, for example - designed to give them immediate feedback on their performance. One even held a balloon between his forearms while he hit balls to prevent his arms from separating during his swing. It reminded me a little of that football helmet device Rene Russo gave Kevin **Costner in the movie, "Tin Cup."** **Ok, not** really but if a tool or aid works, golfers seem willing to endure it!

The most high-tech gadget used by over half the players is something called TrackMan, which has an estimated retail price of \$25,000. About the size of a laptop, the device, when positioned behind the golfer, can record the arc, speed distance and loads more data on every swing. You can replay your performance on TrackMan, an iPad or even your cell phone.

To be sure, all these devices and data are helpful, but having a coach who can show and tell a player about his performance is crucial. The feedback generally suggests more or less of some direct action - ***Keep your arm straighter. Don't slide into the ball. Cup your wrist more. Accelerate through your putt. Take a shorter backstroke.***

The instruction and input I heard certainly helped players in that practice environment, and many take that direction and instruction and execute it on the course.

One of the players I greatly admire is Patrick Reed. He is a wonderful ball striker and played superbly until a point midway through the final round. An announcer noted during the round that, **"Golf is a game of awareness and the ability to adjust."** **Hearing that got** me thinking

about the differences between coaching sports and my own work as a coach to senior managers.

Recently, I returned from assisting a group of senior leaders on their development. The top company official had told these high-potential leaders that to be promotable, they need to have each identified and developed their successors.

The leadership approach most needed when developing leaders is coaching as it helps *steer* someone toward finding the answer. This type of coaching is fundamentally different than PGA, Major League Baseball or National Football League coaching.

In business, coaching - non-directive, Socratic guidance - is the leadership style I see least often. For example, a coaching leader would ask things like: *What have you tried? How has that worked? Did any part of the approach work? Which part? Why do you think that was? What else can you do? and What have you learned so far?*

While it might be easy for that business coach to simply tell the person what to do, that would violate the spirit of this approach. The coach would have to think of a question they could ask that would steer the person closer to discovering the answer for themselves.

**One approach isn't necessarily better than the other; it's just that the objectives are** different. A sports coach is looking for imitation and compliance to improve, not independent thought to solve a problem. A coach in a business setting, on the other hand, is trying to build repeatable and sustainable capability in his or her absence. The person being coached is guided, not directly instructed.

That is a crucial difference, since there is a greater likelihood that a well-coached business leader who runs into difficulty on the back nine of their responsibilities will be able to independently adjust and solve the problem.

### About the Author

*David Hoff is the chief operation officer and executive vice president for leadership development at E·A·S·I·Consult®. E·A·S·I·Consult works with Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and mid-sized corporations to provide customized Talent Management solutions. E·A·S·I·Consult specialties include individual assessment, online employment testing, survey research, competency modeling, leadership development, executive coaching, 360-degree feedback, online structured interviews, and EEO hiring compliance. The company is a leader in the field of providing accurate information about people through professional*

assessment. To learn more about E•A•S•I-Consult, visit <https://easiconsult.com> or email [ContactUs@easiconsult.com](mailto:ContactUs@easiconsult.com) or call 800.922.EASI.