

COACHING GUIDE MODULE 6

LESSON 3: BEHAVIORS THAT HOLD YOU BACK

EXTREME SUPPORT – OBTAIN ENOUGH AND THE RIGHT KIND - BEHAVIOR #3

Many people hesitate to ask for help, especially at work. I think the reason we are reluctant to reach out for support is because we are afraid others might assess us as less capable or less competent. This is erroneously thinking; smart people gather other smart people to help them problem solve and execute on goals and deliverables. Having a sponsor, mentor, and a coach regardless of the job you have or where you sit on the corporate ladder – is just plain smart career management.

And yes, everyone needs all three of these personal board of director resources to support them.

Personal Board of Director Role - Sponsor. How to Find One.

A sponsor is someone who has a seat at the big table, the power to influence decisions at the big table, who has line of sight on your work as they use their influencing power and networking to connect you with good jobs, stretch assignments, special projects and puts your name forward whether you are in the room, or not. Sponsors are those who work inside your organization and are usually found at the executive or senior management level. They are individuals with political clout in your organization and are seen by others as key stakeholders with big organizational impact.

It is important for you to have a sponsor because this person will have your back and will rigorously put your name forward for career and promotional opportunities even when you are not in the room. Especially when you are not in the room. All critical career conversations that concern you happen behind closed doors when you are not present, therefore, having someone who has your back, even when you are not around to promote yourself, is just smart career management. Everyone needs a sponsor, someone who can be your advocate when you are not present in order to make certain you get the right exposure and visibility to the right people. Ask yourself, "Who do I need to help me be a success here?" This question will help you find a sponsor. Sponsors ensure you will get more support, help you increase your visibility, and will be one of your key allies to help you get where you want to go professionally. Not having one will definitely hold you back professionally.

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The best example of a phenomenal sponsor happened to my client, Kim. Kim was promised a promotion from her current Director title to Vice President within six months after she accepted her new job in the company. It was one of the reasons she accepted the job offer.

Unfortunately, Kim's manager who made her the title promotion promise left the organization and Kim's promotion got stalled. For 3 years, Kim's now new manager gave her excuse after excuse as to why she wasn't getting promoted but with the promise that her promotion would happen "soon". It did not. One day, after one of our coaching sessions we discussed how she wanted to handle this issue. She decided to reach out to her sponsor for his help. Kim said to him, "I believe I deserve the Vice President title because ... " and then she presented her case and included all the reasons she deserved the promised promotional title. Kim then said respectfully, "I am not threatening to leave the company if I don't get the Vice President title that was promised me over 3 years ago, but I want you to know how important this is to me." And then she added, "Unless the new title gets approved by the next Board meeting, I'm going to take it as a signal that I am not considered a valuable asset to the company and I will need to think seriously about whether this is the right place for me to work and whether I still want to continue my career here."

I really love how Kim articulated her position. At the next Board meeting, Kim's name came up for the promotion. Kim's current manager spoke up first and said she did not think Kim was ready yet for the Vice President promotional title. The Chief Operating Officer, who was Kim's sponsor, quickly spoke up and said he thought they were overlooking Kim's solid contributions and then outlined all the reasons he believed (using the list of reasons Kim had given him previously and adding some of his own) Kim deserved the Vice President title, now.

Here is the best part. He said, "I feel very strongly that Kim is ready for this title and has proven her value to the company and because I feel so strongly about this, if we don't give her this title today, I will be giving the Board my resignation."

Now, that's unbelievable sponsor support, isn't it?!

Not all sponsors would have that kind of conviction or threaten to leave the company nor should they, but, imagine if you were Kim and this incredible man was on your personal board of directors as your sponsor? Yes, Kim received her new promotional title that very day, but let's be honest, without her sponsor's extreme support, it most likely would not have happened. Without a sponsor, we are hampered in ways we don't even realize. Go get yourself an amazing sponsor.

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Personal Board of Director Role - Mentor. How to Find One.

Mentors play a different role in our career journey. Sometimes mentors work inside our organization, although they can also be someone who works outside the company as well. What makes mentors unique and valuable to our careers is they have first-hand knowledge of the job you have because they have been in your role or job previously and they specifically know what you need to know, learn, and do because they have the relevant prior experience. Mentors are invaluable to help strategically guide your work and career. Everyone needs at least one mentor.

I had a wonderful mentor experience when I started in my first job at a big Boston bank early in my career. My mentor, Marion called me into her office one afternoon and said to me, “People are talking about something you did on the xyz project and what I am hearing is not all that positive. Do you want to know what feedback I have been hearing and then we can figure out together what to do about it?” It was invaluable for me to know the truth. Because of Marion’s experience, as she had held my same job many years before, she was able to walk me through step by step what to do and how to fix it. This was especially helpful to my 26-year-old self who knew almost nothing at all about how to work in a business environment, having just started in my first job in Human Resources. Having multiple mentors can also be helpful but *not* having one will definitely hold you back.

Personal Board of Director Role - Coach. How to Find One.

Similar to the world of sports, a good professional coach can see your potential, help you raise your own performance bar, and achieve better results. The most valuable coaches are those who can be found *outside* your organization. The reason for this is because external coaches are objective and are more likely to tell you the unbiased truth about anything and everything as they have no stake in the outcome of your game beyond supporting you. Some organizations have internal coaches but most of the time, having been one myself and working with many over the years, they are working to navigate you towards what your boss and the organization wants for you – even if you do not want it for yourself. One of the obvious problems with this is that they often navigate behind the scenes and without telling you. I have found this is true for many reasons – they think if they tell you, it will lower your morale, productivity, or you will give your notice and leave. The other reason that is prevalent is that so many managers are not comfortable telling the stark truth especially if its negative news so they sugar coat the feedback to you or don’t tell you at all. In addition, internal coaches are NOT objective and have a strategic direction to follow with you as one of their organizational chess pieces. Internal coaches are still valuable as a personal career resource but it is career suicide to tell them everything – you need to be more cautious and save your most transparent conversations for your external coach so you can work through issues impacting your performance and success.

External resources have no stake in your game beyond supporting you which is what makes them such a valuable resource.

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Having a coach is an excellent resource to assist you in obtaining your goals and removing the personal roadblocks that you may be unknowingly putting in your own way. I have had a coach to help me grow myself and my business for over 30 years. The guidance and self-reflection that coaching has provided me all these years has been one of the best things I have done for myself professionally and I look at my coach as an invaluable resource on my personal Board of Directors. I strongly believe everyone needs a professional leadership coach. Go get one for yourself to help you raise your own bar and soar professionally.

Sponsors, mentors and coaches are all fabulous resources who will help you grow yourself professionally. All three roles play different, yet crucial, support and guidance to help you gain the skills, qualities and confidence to progress in your career. People typically have many coaches throughout their career life cycle. Look for one that has a specialty in what you want to develop next. As you might predict, coaches have different areas of expertise. Find one that matches where you are headed not where you are planted now if you want to move up, get promoted or raise your own bar.

Mentors are harder to find and sponsors can be even more difficult to locate. Hard doesn't mean you should quit, just keep looking until you find the right ones for you. Important qualities to bring into any of these developmental relationships include professionalism, ethics, and integrity. Sponsors particularly look for these qualities before offering their backing, because their sponsorship reflects back on their own integrity and reputation. Understanding these support resources and understanding which pivotal person is missing from your Board of Directors team and in your career will provide you with great insight. Filling these gaps for yourself will help propel yourself forward with more ease.

EXERCISE 1: Ask 3 people you respect how they went about finding a professional coach, mentor, and sponsor and determine how their answers might help you.

EXERCISE 2: Identify 1-2 potential sponsors in your organization. What do you want that they can support you in obtaining for yourself? Write out your ask of them so you have time to think about it strategically and to practice articulating before going live with your ask. Ultimately, it would be best to have a sponsor who actually knows how to be one and has prior experience. To start, discuss together what factors or conditions would be important for you both to feel satisfied about the relationship you will create together.

EXERCISE 3: Identify 1-2 potential mentors either inside or outside your organization. Again, ask yourself what goal(s) do you have that they can support you in obtaining? Again, write out what specifically you want to ask before you make your ask. Together with your mentor, outline what you both think is the right structure for effective mentoring and your success.

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Finding a coach is a bit like finding the right therapist, doctor, or spouse/partner. Knowing what you're looking for and where you are headed next will help. However, ultimately having the right chemistry plays a huge role. After doing your due diligence, your final selection will be best determined by your gut instincts and how you feel when you talk with them. Look for someone who makes you feel comfortable, but will also push you. A coach is not someone who is going to tell you exactly what you want to hear all of the time. Often, they will ask questions that might evoke feelings of discomfort because they hold up a mirror to show you things you might not want to face. This is a good thing. Who else will tell you the unvarnished truth? Be wary of folks who tell you exactly what you want to hear all of the time, and choose the person with whom you feel you can share your vulnerabilities with more freely.

A good place to start is to interview coaches that other people you respect recommend to determine if they might be the right fit for you.

EXERCISE 4: Identify at least one potential coach to interview to determine fit and alignment. These are three questions you can ask to start with to determine if this person might be the right coach for you.

- **What are your credentials?** – Having a certified coach is a good idea, however, coaching accreditation does not insure this person has received appropriate training and experience to do this work. Many many organizations that provide accreditation are no more regulated than the industry itself, so it is important to take the extra step of researching what training the coach has received. For example, there are some coaching certification programs that last anywhere from one to six weekends and provide minimal or no hands-on experience as part of the training. Other programs — some offered by reputable universities — offer a far more robust curriculum that includes direct client work necessary to develop the skills of their students. Taking the time to pull back the certification curtain will help screen out amateurs. I recommend coaches who are certified through CoachU, The Coaches Training Institute, The Newfield Network, and other coach training programs that are accredited through the International Coach Federation (ICF) which is the largest non-profit membership of coaches worldwide. ICF has very robust coach certification requirements that takes most people years of training, supervision, and a significant amount of coaching hours to obtain. The application process for coach certification is very rigorous which is why I trust their coaching certification designations. If you are lucky enough to find an ICF certified coach, it's a great start in finding the right person for you.
- **How much coaching experience do you have?** - A coaching certificate is not the only way that a person can become a good coach. Certification programs have only gained popularity in the last 20 or so years, and there are coaches who have been doing the work effectively for longer than that. Instead, take a look at their resume and bio for other indicators of a solid career providing the foundation and substance of the person's coaching ability. Years of coaching can be supplemented by practical experience in a specific industry. Be careful though; do your homework.

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You want to make sure that the coach has actual experience working one-on-one with clients as a coach. An industry leader may have the skills and experience to be a great mentor or consultant, but it takes specific training and experience to know how to be an effective coach. There is no substitute for actual coaching experience which is dramatically different from relevant work experience.

- **How did they do in the interview?** - Before hiring a coach, be sure to do a thorough interview of them. Ask them how they work with their clients. Do they know how to adjust their approach to cater to the needs of the client? Does this match with what you hope to get from your experience? You can also ask what they have worked on with clients in the past — if their successes have been in specific areas that don't coincide with your needs, they may not be a good match. You can ask, "Could you tell me about your experience working with a client facing a similar challenge as the one(s) I'm facing?"

STOP: It is important to take the time to get started deeply in this Lesson before moving on to the next Lesson and Coaching Guide.

JOURNAL AND REFLECTIONS

These exercises will help you think strategically about where you are and where you want to go next and most importantly, how you will get there. Your personal Board of Directors that include a sponsor, mentor and coach will be one of the most valuable resources in your career toolbox.

Journal your answers to the questions below. Journaling is more about writing stream of consciousness versus getting it right or making it sound pretty. Journaling is a process that unearths curiosity and wonder within us. After completing the work required in this Lesson, answer the following...

What top 3 observations do you have?

What patterns, if any, do you notice?

What specific things resonated most or seem right on target for you? And why?

What resonated least or seems less relevant for you? And why?

What are your biggest ahas or take-aways?

What did you learn about yourself that delighted you most?

What are 1-2 next steps you will take with this information you now have?

FOLLOW UP

Want more help understanding what this all means and how it relates to where you are or where you're going, reach out to me at Wendy Capland, wcapland@visionquestconsulting.com to schedule a one hour 1:1 Coaching Session. Investment-\$500.