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The New Manager- **Education**

The joy of coaching

A professional coach recalls with gratitude the guidance and encouragement given to him by his teacher..

Good coaching like good habits is learnt early in life. A child, when coached with kindness and gentleness, absorbs the lessons well. I find people learn best when they are positively nudged not driven.

— C. Ratheesh Kumar



Empathy and encouragement can soothe a troubled mind.

T.T. Srinath

I remember with great fondness my teacher R. Srinivasan; he played a part in so many lives, mine being one of them.

In some ways my geography teacher and Principal of Vidya Mandir, Mylapore, taught me the fine art of being coached.

He would talk to me, push me to bring out my best; he would give me a poem, one that I liked a lot, and ask me to read it to him. Then he would say, “try to say it differently”. When I had done so, he would say again, “this time say it as if you were an old man saying it to a young child.”

I was not much more than a child myself, being all of 14, so it seemed ridiculous that I should attempt to recite the poem as someone older. Yet he would push me. The inbuilt lesson I realised later in life — when working as a trainer and teaching a bunch of school children, I realised it was a lesson in empathy.

“See how hard it is for an elder to get into the mind of a child?” A deep thought I remind myself of when I speak to youngsters.

My father had passed away and I was alone and sad, grappling with inadequacy, a sense of loss and meaninglessness.

He would visit me each day after school, take me for a walk and talk to me, hold my hand and tell me his story.

He would ask me to talk about my feelings and make statements about him that told me he was not talking down to me but with me. I learnt to share feelings without fear of being judged. A good mentor and coach does not judge — I learnt this lesson when still a child.

He taught us geography, a subject many of us disliked. He would share a concept with us and then ask us to go to a library and explore the idea. His attempt was to train us to enquire and seek answers. Good coaching urges the coachee to seek answers, much like teaching one to fish.

When we walked together, he would ask an innocuous question such as, “So what did you do today?” He would then be silent while I spoke, nodding or shaking his head in agreement or disagreement. When I had exhausted myself, he would simply repeat to me in parrot-like fashion all I had said.

He was mindful of neither interpreting anything I had said nor adding his own wisdom. That way, I felt listened to. He was also subtly showing me a mirror, letting me experience all I had said.

A good coach mirrors back, helping one recognise contradiction, if any, in what he has said.

He would then help me climb out of the pit of delusion by sharing stories of great men. Oftentimes I would be enthused by his examples for, in the moment, it made me feel valued and great.

Good coaching

Good coaching like good habits is learnt early in life. A child, when coached with kindness and gentleness, absorbs the lessons well. I find people learn best when they are positively nudged not driven.

“A man was attempting to feed his dog some medicine. Try what he might, he could not get the dog to drink the potion. In frustration, he threw the container on the ground, spilling the contents. No sooner, he found the dog licking the medicine from the floor. The dog, he realised, was not resisting the medicine only the manner of administration.”

As I go into the world offering my fare of coaching, I am reminded of the few lessons I learnt long ago as a child:

1. Empathise
2. Do not judge
3. Encourage the seeking of answers
4. Listen and mirror back
5. It is not what you say but the manner you say it that matters.

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