Leadership Coaching Tip

Coaching Beyond the Individual

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One of the goals of coaching individuals who are in or aspire to leader roles that is often cited in the literature on leadership is that the individual know themselves. This means to know the upper left quadrant in the AQAL model, that is, to know one's own aspirations, assumptions, worldview, values and intentions. Clarity about these and how they influence one's meaning making about self and context is useful for choosing behaviors that facilitate achieving what is important to the individual being coached.

But when we step into any "role"—based on the expectations of both ourselves and others—we are engaging something much bigger than self. Working to learn how to comprehend a larger whole than oneself certainly does not leave the individual behind, but leads to understanding the individual—and the role—in context. Again, from an AQAL perpsective, this means understanding the cultural context and one's own relationship to that culture. It also means developing clarity about the copious systems, processes and technologies available and accessible for the individual, as well as other stakeholders in that role.

For example, a particular leader role has a variety of stakeholders. Each—or each set—can be understood in terms of their own aspirations, worldviews, values and intentions. Understanding these opens up possibilities of identifying modes of communication, themes, and even specific language for effectively engaging with those stakeholders from the position of a leader role. Furthermore, this approach breaks down the ideological classification of stakeholder sets and promotes a more nuanced understanding that leads to opportunities for collaboration and attracting support, As some leadership theorists have understood, this is a mutual influence process.

Also, by developing clarity about systems, processes and technologies, the individual can explore which of these he or she is leveraging—or not—to promote the purposes shaped in the leader role—through interaction with stakeholders. A simple example of this is choices of means of communciations. An individual may feel most comfortable using emails and memos. That leaves out direct face-to-face approaches or engaging in group processes, such as a planning team and more.

Understanding the potentials of culture, systems, processes and technologies, one's own relationship to them and how to leverage them is as much about leading as is understanding self.