



Coachability and Emotional Intelligence

Darrell Beck, Ph.D.,CMC

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A recent three year global study of over 5,000 hiring managers found that 46% of new hires will fail within 18 months, and only 19% will achieve unequivocal success. The two main reasons: First, poor coachability, or the inability to receive and act on feedback from others. Second, poor emotional intelligence (EQ), or the inability to perceive, understand and manage one's own emotions and those of others. Recently the 75 Stanford's Graduate Business Advisory Council members were asked to name the most important capability for leaders to develop. The answer? Self knowledge and self mastery.

Whether you are a family manager in your company, developing the business pipeline, or a family member, mentor or other advisor developing the family leadership pipeline, it is critical that you work with those in your charge to assess and develop coachability and emotional intelligence.

The following is a questioning process that you can use. It is phrased to fit better with the in-the-business pipeline mentoring and development, but once you understand the structure and intent, you can make it a bit more informal to fit with the family context. Keep in mind, also, that an early start in the life of a family member is more impactful than beginning in mid adulthood.

In your words, say something like the following:

One of the ways that good leaders get better is by adjusting or changing their behavior based on coaching that they get from others. Those others may be a peer, customer, direct report, manager, family member, or someone else in your life.

I'll ask you some questions, have discussions with some of those whom you mention, and get back to you with a coaching conversation from me about how you can improve this vital skill.

For my questions to you, I'm less interested in how you fine-tune a specific skill set, i.e. 'use fewer numbers and graphs in your PowerPoint presentations'—and more interested in changes you've made in how you interact with others based on coaching you've received.

For each example you give, I'll ask that you be as specific as possible, giving me the background, names, working relationship of the person to

you, nature and content of the coaching comments, and what you did as a result of the information received.

Also, let me know whether the coaching was solicited or unsolicited by you. I'll talk with some of those you cite and close the loop with you to let you know how well your perception matches theirs.

As the interviewer, listen to determine how difficult it is for the family member to answer these questions. Does he want to stick with safe or self-serving examples of coaching feedback he's gotten, such as being told that his desire for perfection was intimidating to others? Does she want to stick with long-ago examples? Does he have a hard time even thinking up examples? If so, that is data for you that the family member does not think in terms of getting coaching from others, which in itself indicates low coachability. Listen also for the ratio of unsolicited to solicited coaching.

Family members who can't think of examples of times when they solicited coaching probably really don't want to get it. And family members who don't really want coaching, communicate that sentiment to others in many, many ways—often nonverbally.

Listen to the nature of the relationship from which the family member gets coaching. If it is all from senior family members, bosses and customers, with the occasional peer thrown in, that tells you that power equality or superiority is a condition of giving the family member feedback. Direct reports and most peers dare not do so.

Here are some follow-up probes for you to use as follow up questions to the examples the family member gives.

- A. Had you ever heard this before?*
- B. Why do you think you hadn't heard this before (if applicable)?*
- C. Did it seem difficult or awkward for this person to provide you with this feedback?*
- D. Was this hard for you to hear? Did you feel surprised, defensive or angry?*
- E. How was your relationship with this individual affected?*

In general, the emotionally open, coachable person will give examples which have some recurrent themes—not all isolated; “never heard this before” and “never heard this again” messages. Also that person will own up to some initial feelings of shock, defensiveness, anger, as well as to an occasional tentativeness in the relationship for a time. These are the marks of a well-adjusted, coachable person. If you don't hear any of these characteristics you are interviewing a person who will not be very coachable—and your very important work is cut out for you.

Emotional intelligence is an important competency for any leader in any business. But it's even more critical to those in family businesses because of the additional number, complexity and intimacy of relationships to be navigated in the family.

Assessing Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

The same general questioning, data gathering from those named, giving feedback to the family member for his or her growth will work for emotional intelligence. Here's a questioning sequence for EQ.

Describe to me a situation when you became aware that your feelings were being misinterpreted by another.

- *How were you coming across to the other differently than you intended?*
- *How did you become aware of it?*
- *What did you do?*

Discuss an instance when you were not getting through to the other person in the way you wanted or intended. Perhaps you were intending to help them think through a situation, and it came across as giving them the second degree. Or you were intending to help them feel better about a mistake that they'd made, and it came across as you having low expectations of them. Or you were trying to understand their resistance to undertaking a particular project, and it came across as coercion on your part.

- *What was the nature of the mis-connection?*
- *How did you become aware of it?*
- *What did you do?"*

These questions and the responses you get from the family member should give you fairly accurate keys to the family member's emotional intelligence. If the family member has great difficulty even thinking of examples or instances along these lines, that is data for you that he or she is largely tone-deaf to the EQ side of leadership.

Both coachability and emotional intelligence can be developed, and the earlier in life the better. They are critical components to focus on for those charged with developing tomorrow's leaders. The Stanford Business Advisors cited at the beginning of this article said that they saw leaders so interested in outer success, outer achievement that they neglected the introspection and feedback necessary to full development, and had a rather hollow core. Help your family's leaders develop as full people. Your family and your business will be the richer for it.