

MINDSET OF A SUCCESSFUL ACTION LEARNING COACH

A competent and confident action learning coach can have a tremendous impact on the quality of the actions and the learnings for an action learning group. As a result of training and practice, most certified coaches have developed the skills to enable teams to learn and act in powerful ways. However, in my 25 years as an action learning coach, I have discovered that my *mindset* before and during the session is as critical as the skills, guidance and questions that I ask. Here are the five basic elements of my mindset that I incorporate whenever I serve as an action learning coach.

1. Confidence and trust in the action learning process

My total confidence and trust that the action learning process and script will work allows me to relax, slow down, and be patient. It makes it easier to observe and accept situations when activities and actions do not work smoothly or as expected. Knowing that action learning is built on numerous and powerful psychological, educational, political, biological, neuro-scientific and sociological theories that are seamlessly integrated into the process assure me that the final actions and learning will be wonderful. For me, these powerful theories work in the social universe similarly as electrons work in the physical universe. Questions are like the electrons that are hurling within the container of the two norms. Just as the electrons inevitably strike each other and cause the atomic explosion, so too do the questions eventually and inevitably lead to an explosion of creative actions and powerful learnings. Thus, although there will be bumps and unexpected turbulence along the way, I remain confident that the action learning script and process will always lead to a powerful experience, full of actions and learnings.



TRUST
THE
Process

2. Confidence and trust in the group as a whole



Action learning groups are composed of individuals who represent a wide continuum of expertise, experience, positive-negative personality traits, commitment to the problem, etc. Membership may be well-planned by the organization in consultation with the coach or may be haphazardly put together with little foresight. As the coach, I always work with the belief that this group of individuals will be more than capable of solving the problem and developing great strategies. As long as I competently perform my responsibility as a coach, I am confident that these individuals have all the necessary abilities and resources to achieve success. Of course,

there will be individuals whose personalities and commitment I prefer; however, as a coach, I never show disappointment with any individual member.

Most of us are aware of the research that has shown that when teachers are told that their young students are gifted, these teachers achieve great results, whereas teachers who are told that their students are retarded produce much poorer results. Likewise, in action learning – if the coach believes their action learning team is fine and will be successful, the positive mindset of the coach will enable him or her to consciously and subconsciously act in a way that engenders great results with the teams and each individual member. It is important to also note that the attitude of the coach, be it negative or positive, confident or non-confident, will be ultimately perceived by the group and impact their actions and learnings.

3. “Unconditional positive regard for each individual”

Carl Rogers, the noted humanist psychologist, used the term “unconditional positive regard” to describe the attitude he sought to achieve with every individual he encountered. Likewise, the action learning coach should seek to have a positive caring for each team member, no matter their personality or whether they are likable to you or not. Coaches must try to be open and non-judgmental and respectful of all team members. This caring may be exceedingly difficult and challenging with some individuals, but the coach must never be seen as favoring one person over another. It is important that we believe that everyone has goodness within them, and that each person is capable of changing and learning. I have often been warned that individual “x” is a terrible person and will be a disaster in the action learning group, and then was totally surprised how differently and well this person participated in the action learning session. I attribute these positive behaviors to my positive mindset as well as the positive, powerful culture created in action learning, especially by the norms and language of questions. Action learning truly brings out the best within each of us.



4. Commitment to the importance of learning

Obtaining great actions and wonderful strategies are certainly satisfying for the team and the coach. However, we must remember that learning is equally, if not more, important. Solving the problem may be worth \$1 million to the organization; but the various learnings – development of great leaders who are involved in innumerable actions over the foreseeable future, building of a great team that can solve many future and more difficult problems, changing the culture of the organization to become a learning organization – all of these benefits may be worth \$10 million or more for the organization.

Also, it is important that I learn from every session that I coach so that I can become even more effective in future sessions. I challenge myself at every session to ask a question that I have not asked before, a question which is unique to this problem/group/organization. At the end of every session that I coach, I ask myself – what I did well as a coach, and what I could do better?

5. Belief that I, as a coach, have the unique and awesome opportunity to positively change the life of every member of the group.

Serving as an action learning coach is a precious gift that I have been given. I always welcome this wonderful opportunity to positively impact people for the rest of their lives. I therefore enter each action learning session with the expectation that if I coach well and ask great questions with courage and skill, I will be able to (1) significantly develop their leadership skills so they can regularly implement that skill better than they have ever done before, (2) improve their interpersonal interactions with co-workers, family, friends and strangers, (3) rethink the basic assumptions that may have hindered their growth and create new assumptions that will empower their lives, and/or (4) enhance their learning skills so they can better change and grow as human beings. In short, as a coach, my mindset is one of gratitude and power since I have the ability to enable and empower people to change their worlds and the world around them.



Incorporating these five attributes into your mindset as you prepare for and implement action learning coaching will, I believe, result in greater success, comfort, and enjoyment as an action learning coach. What we expect does influence what we get. Why not expect the very best?

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