

The Coaching Approach to Growth

By Tony Stoltzfus

A while back I was agonizing over how to fund a new venture. Do I raise money, and spend the added time to form a board and do books for a non-profit? Do I enlist investors and give up ownership in the organization? Or do I take out a personal loan (which I find distasteful) and run it as a business? Several self-imposed deadlines had come and gone, and I still couldn't decide.

Finally I sat down with my friend Tim, a successful businessman who's also a coach, and asked for help. I laid out my conundrum in detail, going through the pluses and minuses of each option, and then inquired: "What do you think I should do?" He thought for a moment, and then responded, "I think you know in your heart what the answer is."

Darn! I wanted him to tell me what to do! So I steered the conversation back around and posed the same question in a different way. Tim thought for a moment—and then gave me an identical reply!

When we said goodbye, I was frustrated to not have an answer, but his coaching also left me feeling strangely empowered to face my decision and make a choice. On the way home, God spoke to me: "If you don't have the confidence to invest in yourself, you'll never achieve what you are capable of." When I talked it over with my wife, I found that God had spoken to her that day, too, and we made a great decision together to move forward.

Why take the time to help people figure out their own solutions when it is so much easier to tell them the "right answer?" It always seems to take longer to help people think things through than it does to do the thinking for them. So what's the benefit of taking a coaching approach and asking instead of telling?

The story recounted above is a great example of the power of coaching. Here are six things that Tim accomplished by asking that never would have come from giving advice:



- **Empowerment.** By *not* telling me what to do, Tim sent a powerful message: “I believe in you! I believe you know what to do. I believe you can hear God on this. You can make a great choice.” His belief in me gave me the confidence I needed to make a decisive choice.
- **Ownership.** Because I made the decision, I owned it. It was my choice. If Tim had told me what to do and it didn’t work out, then whose fault would it be?
- **Motivation.** When people come up with their own ideas and solutions, they are most motivated to pursue them. The pivotal factor in change isn’t knowing what to do; it’s having the motivation to get it done. Tim’s approach produced the highest possible motivation in me to move forward—in fact, within 24 hours I had already acted on something I’d put off for months.
- **Leadership Development.** Tim’s approach compelled me as a leader to take responsibility for living out my call. A leader’s sphere of influence is directly proportional to his or her ability to take responsibility. By pushing me to grow in responsibility, Tim helped me grow as a leader.
- **Growth in Hearing God.** Tim challenged me to hear the voice of God for myself. His approach didn’t just result in one great decision: by strengthening my ability to hear God, he’s impacted every decision I’ll make from here on.
- **You Could Be Wrong.** I gave Tim three options: that means any advice he gave me would have a two-out-of-three chance of being wrong. You won’t realize how often your discernment about other’s is wrong until you stop giving advice and start waiting to see what God actually does!

Adapted from *The Peer Coaching Workbook* by Tony Stoltzfus, www.Coach22.com