

Unlocking Potential

**7 Coaching Skills That Transform
Individuals, Teams, and Organizations**

Michael K. Simpson
with **MARIA SULLIVAN** and **KARI SADDLER**

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

amazon publishing


PART ONE
FOUR PRINCIPLES
OF COACHING

1

TRUST

Coaching is an intentional conversation in which the coach listens to, questions, and acknowledges the perspective of the coachee to facilitate self-reliant problem-solving and action. Effective coaching is based on building trust, tapping potential, creating commitment, and executing goals. Consider how successful a coach would be who is unreliable, lacks credibility, doesn't trust others, and inconsistently utilizes coaching skills and tools. The success of all coaches comes from the inside out. Unless coaches internalize, model, and live by these principles, they will fail!

In this section of the book, I examine each of these principles and how to apply them to help build trust and credibility as a coach. If you can “coach” yourself to live by these principles, you will be well on your way to helping others as a coach.

The International Coach Federation (ICF) has published a set of ethical standards for coaches.⁴ Among other things, all professional coaches pledge to:

- show genuine concern for the individual's welfare and future;
- continuously demonstrate personal integrity, honesty, and sincerity;
- keep confidences.

Most would agree that only a person who upholds these values can be trusted, and the first requirement of coaching is to be trusted.

Of course, these are all statements of ethics. We can understand them, have the will to live by them, and even preach them to others. We can do all these things and still be untrustworthy. It is only when these ethics are modeled and become part of our very being that we can be fully trusted.

Simply being in a position of authority does not make you a trusted coach. Your concern for the person you are coaching must be based on genuine good intent. Your integrity must be inviolable. Your determination to keep confidences must be unshakable.

One of my coauthors, Kari Saddler, tells the story of her client Monica, who worked in the emergency department of a large community hospital. As a new leader, Monica was tasked with significant goals, including reducing the amount of time patients waited to see a doctor and decreasing the percentage of patients who left without seeing a doctor at all. In six months, she'd made significant improvements utilizing an innovative system with a dashboard. Monica's superiors all praised her efforts and results.

Her team, however, was another story. Kari met Monica when she began coaching her through the results of a 360-degree assessment of her leadership. To say Monica's team did not like her was an understatement. The comments included statements like, "She only cares about the numbers!" and "We hate her dashboard!"

"How can they say that about me?" Monica had asked through tears. She was the kind of leader who knew every member of her team, knew about their lives and families, brought in pizza, had them to her home for holiday parties. She thought her team loved her.

Through coaching conversations, Monica realized that when she'd implemented all the changes to the emergency department, she had assumed that her team knew why it was important to change the way they ran the department. Without understanding the true intent,

Monica's team assumed that she was trying to improve the numbers for the department because it made her look good. One of the first changes Monica made in her leadership was to begin opening every conversation about the dashboard with a statement of why it was so important: "Remember, folks, we are here to save lives. We can't save lives if they walk out the door before they see the doctor. How are we doing today?"

Monica made other changes to her leadership style as well. She realized that her fast pace sometimes meant that she gave people answers rather than letting them solve their problems. She began modeling the coaching approach, and when a matter was not truly urgent, she expressed confidence in her team members' ability to come up with solutions. She asked them questions to allow them to find their own answers. She became a coaching leader. Coaching leaders ask insightful questions that help people gain greater awareness of their situation and help them reframe and creatively explore new and better ways to move forward.

Your intent here matters. You have their best interests foremost in mind. You talk straight to them. You listen empathically, help them see and explore options for moving forward, and show respect to them. These are issues of character—*your* character. If you can't show genuine concern, if you are distracted or have other priorities on your mind—stop. Train yourself to stay in the moment with the person whom you are coaching, to keep your mind focused solely on that person's life, leadership, career, or performance agenda. Your goal is to focus on their agenda, not your agenda.

FranklinCovey has surveyed more than 54,000 people, asking them to identify the essential qualities of a great leader. Integrity is by far the number one quality, according to the global respondents. Stephen M. R. Covey confirms what the survey found: "The ability to establish, extend, and restore trust with all key stakeholders—customers, business partners, investors, and coworkers—is the key leadership competency of the new global economy."⁵ Why is trust the most important of all

leadership competencies? It drives and enables success with all other competencies.

Stephen M. R. Covey helped to lead the merger between two companies, the Covey Leadership Center and the Franklin Quest Company. The merger between these two firms was extremely difficult and fraught with many challenges. The merging of strategies, structures, values, and communications from two very different cultures that had been competing against each other for many years led to a great deal of distrust. In the process of leading this company from a lack of trust during the merger to a culture of high trust many years later, FranklinCovey became one of the most respected and trusted leadership-development companies in the world. Much of the trust and distrust that Stephen M. R. Covey experienced during the merger led to the research and writing of his world-class bestselling book *The Speed of Trust*.

Early in my career, I had a boss who used an approach that was the exact opposite of that of Stephen M. R. Covey: he used a very industrial and authoritative approach to leadership influence. This leader acted in expedient and shortsighted ways that he felt added value, but his method was to influence others around him through spinning data, misinformation, fear, and intimidation. He got along very well with the board of directors and our executive team but had little respect from the majority of people across the organization. In contrast, Stephen M. R. Covey demonstrated very high integrity, good intent, and great capability. He consistently delivered great results. The other leader had little integrity and selfish intent, and he failed to inspire and unleash the talent and passion of his direct reports and staff. He was very intelligent and ambitious, but he was never able to sustain results because people across the organization did not trust him. Those who worked with Stephen M. R. Covey knew of his genuine care, empathy, and integrity and his ability to act in win-win ways and to trust those around him. He focused on building and leveraging team members' strengths, seeing the good in others, valuing all contributions, and rewarding hard work. As

a result, those who worked with him felt like trusted and loyal partners, and they were fully engaged and motivated to produce extraordinary results. As a popular saying puts it: “Great leaders are always out in front with a banner, instead of behind with a whip.” Some leaders operate in a business version of the arcade game Whac-A-Mole—whacking people on the head whenever they make a mistake—rather than celebrating people for doing things right. This is often due to a leader’s lack of emotional intelligence, overabundance of ego, or insecurity.

As an example, an executive coach working with senior members of a large automotive company learned the power of keeping confidences. He was assigned to work with a small group of very experienced, technically skilled leaders. Their technical expertise, however, was far more advanced than their skill in managing people. Their business was having tremendous success, capturing opportunities their competitors were not able to address technically. But the growth was straining their workforce, especially given the poorly developed interpersonal skills and lack of emotional intelligence among certain members of their leadership team. One of the leaders was particularly gruff, standoffish, and rude, and he came very unwillingly to the coaching experience. Three weeks into the process, he was offended by something said in one of the group coaching-debrief sessions. He responded very aggressively, pointing his remarks at the coach. The coach adhered to his principles and did not respond in kind.

In that moment, everything changed.

Afterward, the same rude leader asked to meet with the coach personally. He said he’d been very impressed with the coach’s emotional self-regulation during the stressful situation, and that he now felt comfortable beginning to build a relationship. He told the story of his career and life, his successes and failures. Despite his gruff exterior, he actually wanted help finding a better path forward. Recognizing the extremely personal nature of the disclosures, the coach made it clear that the conversation would be kept completely confidential. “I know,” said the

leader. “I’ve been watching you work with others. I’ve been listening to the stories you share and how you share them, and I’m confident you’ll be as careful with me and my story as you have been with theirs.”

Drawing close to another person requires profound trust. It should never be taken lightly and should always be handled wisely and professionally. When people allow themselves to be vulnerable, the coach must be committed to keeping personal information strictly confidential. It is the most important aspect of the coaching role. Indeed, the lifeblood of truly great coaching is absolute confidentiality.

Trust is hard to earn but easy to lose. It can take weeks and months of gentle and careful nurturing to gain trust—whereas one broken promise, one display of indifference, one instance of manipulation with bad intent, or one failed confidence can ruin everything. That’s why *trust* is the first principle of coaching. All effective coaching starts with an understanding of the great obligation to be trustworthy.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Michael K. Simpson

Michael K. Simpson has over twenty-five years of experience as one of the world's preeminent executive coaches and strategy experts to many Fortune 100 and 500 organizations. As an award-winning author, speaker, executive coach, and senior consultant at FranklinCovey, Michael helps CEOs and executive teams to clarify their vision, set strategy, reach goals, and

build high-performance teams and high organizational trust.

Michael is a fellow with Harvard University's Institute of Coaching (IOC) and a graduate of Columbia University's Executive Coaching Certification Program.

Formerly, Michael was a principal consultant for PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in their Strategic and Organizational Change practice and a senior consultant in change management at Ernst & Young. Michael held executive management positions for two leading technology companies as vice president of sales and marketing and vice president of business development.

Michael is the author or coauthor of several leadership and coaching books, including *Powerful Leadership Through Coaching*, *Unlocking Potential*, and *Talent Unleashed*.

In addition, Michael has been a professor at South China University of Technology; an adjunct professor at Columbia College's School of Business; and a visiting lecturer at Hong Kong University, University of Malaysia, Columbia University's Teachers College, Northwestern University, Brigham Young University, and Utah State University.

Michael is the CEO of Simpson Executive Coaching and the CEO of FranklinCovey-Impact International Education in China. Michael has a master's degree in organizational behavior from Columbia University and a bachelor's degree from BYU's Kennedy Center for International Studies.

When he's not busy traveling, training, consulting, and coaching executives, Michael enjoys spending time with his family in the beautiful Wasatch Mountains of Utah.



Maria “Sully” Sullivan

If Maria Sullivan (a.k.a. Sully) were to have a tattoo, it would say “Tomorrow’s leaders believe that development is the new compensation.” As a leadership development consultant and executive coach for FranklinCovey, Maria works with client organizations that demonstrate agreement with that sentiment.

Educated in New England—first on a dairy farm and then at Dartmouth College—Maria took on senior manager/director roles in the legal, technology, and financial services sectors with bottom-line accountability at Louis Dreyfus, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, and Deloitte. She draws from this experience to support and accelerate her clients’ development. Using the best tools from multiple disciplines, Maria focuses on designing development systems, methods,

and programs that suit the unique personal and organizational needs of her clients. Recent coaching and consulting clients include ten of *Fortune* magazine's 100 Best Companies to Work For.

Maria brings her experience, energy, and drive to her clients' quest for improved leadership performance every single day. When she's not on the road working with an executive, you will find her in Florida spoiling her teenage nephew and any number of dogs.



Kari Saddler

Kari Saddler believes that everyone deserves a leader who inspires and empowers them. She has twenty years of combined experience as a consultant, executive coach, and business manager. She has been a leader at JPMorgan Chase, WellCare, and Tampa General Hospital. In 2015 Kari joined FranklinCovey as an author, speaker, executive coach, and senior consultant.

Kari received her bachelor's degree in English from the Ohio State University and her master of business administration from Ohio Dominican University. She is certified in multiple type-theory tools, including Hogan, MBTI, Predictive Index, and DiSC. Kari is also a professional certified coach and a certified social and emotional intelligence coach.

When she's not working with clients, Kari can often be found driving cross-country for weeks at a time, pulling an RV, boondocking in little-known hideaways, and exploring national parks. She lives outside Dallas, Texas, with her husband and three children.

Please visit www.FranklinCovey.com for additional information about booking these authors for coaching engagements, consulting work, or keynote speeches.