



# Habits Coach

## Leadership Conversation with Dr. James Loehr

### What are the critical assets and strengths of a world-class coach?

In my judgment, the number one issue is someone who has a capacity for deep listening, that you're able to hear what the person is saying on many different levels, that you're completely tuned into them, their dreams, aspirations, frustrations, and challenges; that you get inside that envelope to truly understand what their world looks like from their perspective.

Second, a world-class coach also possesses great humility, which means the executive coach is open to learning as they interact and help clients navigate the storms they have to face.

Third, a world-class coach provokes soulful thinking and reflection, provoking a sense of reality-based connections to the client's deepest values, to who they really want to be, their best selves in all that they do. The coach is always referencing the values that they hold and to what extent their character and behavior serves as a reflection of those values in their everyday work.

Fourth, a world-class coach engenders respect. The client must look at the coach and feel that this is a real person who has a high degree of authenticity not only in what they say, but how they actually live their life – this is a person that I can actually respect. 'They (the coach) not only tell me what to do but I can see that they actually live these principles.'

Finally, the coach expresses a genuine concern for the client as a person; it's much more than a job.

### Please expand if you will on the spiritual aspect of the performance pyramid.

Dr. Loehr: You start with who you want to be, what your purpose is, what your values are, and from that you decide how you're going to view the world, the stories you're going to tell the world. Then you summon the emotional, mental, and physical energy to serve that mission. We tend to get confused as to how human beings are wired – but make no mistake – we're wired from our values first, our character, our sense of importance, and everything if aligned works from there.

### Why are some people (athletes, executives, achievers, etc.) “uncoachable?”

Hubris is one, their ego won't allow it; they are a breed unto themselves, not wanting to admit that someone else can constructively offer anything. It would be almost a signal of weakness for them. You can refer to this as the hardening of the categories – they have reached a point where they're just not open to new ways of thinking and other possibilities. It's scary to them. They're a little put off and view it as an intrusion that you may know something that would actually help them more so than they do – “Who are you to tell me what the heck I need?” In a sense, they may have had more success on many levels than you (the coach) have, so it's difficult for them to acknowledge the value that you bring to the engagement. They'd almost have to admit that they're some incomplete parts of their life.

### **What is the most challenging aspect of coaching senior executives?**

They often have seen so much, heard so much that they get a little cynical – they've seen it all. They may see themselves as graduated and they're no longer open to anything that gets really personal. You see this with certain types of personalities – when it gets personal, you just cannot go there. They're not open to certain kinds of learning: emotional, interpersonal, areas where it's very difficult for them to receive any kind of feedback. They hate 360s, etc. Now understand that this is a small group – really top executives today are heavily screened. For them to have attained such a high level of leadership, they've had to demonstrate strong degrees of personal awareness and humility. People who have this closed, rigid stance in terms of their own development and who they are don't advance very well today. It's pretty clear in all of the literature that company directors and society in general are pushing executives to be more open, more flexible, and to look at things from a different perspective. On the other hand, these types of (rigid) executives do get through some of these filters because they're so extraordinarily talented, but I don't see nearly as many of them anymore. They have been weeded out, cast away, and don't tend to show up in leadership positions any longer.

### **How have you effectively coached a professional who is so resistant?**

They're always a challenge. My experience has been that it's the strength of the coaching relationship that will allow them to enter the space. It's vital that they develop a sense of trust in you, a sense that you really care about them more than you care about building your own business, and that you're genuinely interested in helping them expand their capabilities. You are in their life to be constructively disruptive. They won't grow unless they feel a little uncomfortable; and you're not there to make them feel warm and fuzzy. You're there to help them either get more clarity on values, who they want to be as a leader, and then what the truth is.

The alignment process is always kind of painful. You don't force yourself on to someone; you have to go at their speed. The big issue is trust and a sense that you are really there to help them. If they hang in there, it will be extremely worthwhile for their own self-development. It's very much connected to how you present yourself as a coach and where the client is in his/her life. Now, if you've been referred as a coach and the client is both resistant and angry from the outset, you are going to have some trouble. It will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Again, it's the power of your presence and the sense that you are there to help move them live a better, more effective, happier life. There's no agenda other than the client's best interest.

### **What have you found to be the top 3 keys in coaching entrepreneurs and business owners?**

It's a similar thing. A very successful entrepreneur has a pretty good nose at judging people and their motives. They are very sensitive to the fact that the higher the executive rank, the higher the possibility that the client may be seen as a trophy to the coach. The executives realize that it's a privilege to work at that level – the biggest issue for them is that you are the real deal, extremely trustworthy, and that you really don't give a damn about building your record. You're there to bring value into their life. You don't allow yourself to veer off by getting into casual conversations that would suggest that you're looking for ways to connect and have a personal relationship.

Top entrepreneurs are assessing the amount of wisdom you have, and most aren't looking to have you that involved in their life. They're looking for value and perspective, even though you may not have the experience that they do in the day-to-day leading of an organization.

### **What is the best way to disengage and end a coaching relationship?**

From a business perspective, it's a bit intuitive. However, my goal is to set some boundaries, give the client as much as I can, as quickly as I can, and get them to independence where they don't need me anymore. It's so easy for executives when they find someone they like that you become a confidant for life. I think that's o.k., but what I always worry about is that I have created the dependency, that it really isn't in their

best interests, that they're actually better off to have their own inner coach in their head, and reach out when they have key issue, but they don't necessarily have to have me in their stable to get the most of their ability. Therefore, I set the parameters in the beginning that the coaching engagement is for a limited time. As soon as we feel that the value I bring has been delivered, I'm not going to try to hang on. If the client knows that the disengagement is actually going to come, then in a sense it always works that way.

I do know some executives that have had personal or executive coaches for 10 years or more, and they're like brothers. It becomes very lucrative and satisfying for the coach and the executive enjoys having a fresh set of eyes. It never really gets back to anybody at the firm, and the executive has someone that they can roll their thoughts and decisions around. It's an interesting dynamic. You have to assess every situation as unique. At the end of the day, I think you tend to get better if you don't develop these relationships that are dependent. It's not about the coaching perks, flying on the executive plane, etc.; I've seen this many times with executives where they hook into a coach and the ride lasts a long time.

### **How do you set the duration of the coaching engagement?**

It can be 3-, 6-, 9-, or 12-months...the key is that you place parameters around the engagement. If at any time the client feels that they are not receiving the appropriate value, the agreement can be terminated. The client is always in the driver's seat in terms of evaluating the return on investment of company energy, time, and money. It's always about the client's best interests, not what's best for your coaching practice.

### **What has been your greatest coaching success and why?**

I've had a lot of every exciting experiences. One of the most exciting was my work with Dan Jansen over the course of two years, and then he wins the gold medal at the Olympics. Everyone said Dan couldn't win it. I had Dan fill out a training log every single day for two years, and I have them all here in my office. I was probably as elated as anything in my entire life when he won the gold medal and broke the world record. It was the same event that Dan had come in 26<sup>th</sup> place two years earlier in Albertville so it was a very big deal. Dan had done everything we'd asked him to do and we spent lots of time together. With all the drama, the press, and the demons that Dan had to exorcise, he did it - I was so happy for him, his family, his coaches. It was a great story.

### **How does a coach get coached and mentored?**

Even great coaches need coaches. You'd be surprised – we've had some of the most esteemed coaches, iconic superstars, who have asked for coaching, which is a big deal. Everybody needs a coach, I don't care who you are. Sometimes when you get to this pinnacle, you can't talk to anybody because you're afraid someone might get some information on you by learning who really are, but you have to have somebody that you trust. Someone that can help you face the truth and reconnect to the deepest values that you have, and make sure you're on track to living the life that you'd like to live. Everyone needs someone they respect as well as some assistance in navigating the landmines of life that pop up and cause us to question the basic core of our being. Perhaps it's a death of a loved one or a losing season where a job is threatened or sudden notice of a health condition. People assume because you're at an elite level, you don't need a coach. That's a mistake.

### **Do you have any specific habits that have helped you continue to develop personally and professionally?**

Absolutely. I try to follow what we teach here at the Human Performance Institute. We have an outstanding environment here where thousands of executives have come through. I do this (coach and consult) almost every week with executives from all over the world. Every week I'm confronted with these great leaders who have had to rise up and do things that are almost beyond human understanding. I have a great respect for the capacity that human beings have, dealing with chaos, horror, sadness, what's recently occurred in New York with Hurricane Sandy. People need coaches, someone who can help lead them out of this nightmare

situation where it seems everything around them is hopeless. I've been inspired by these kinds of folks and I do have people that I really admire and I seek their help in my own life. We have this whole process that we bring people through – that I put myself through all the time – it's very useful. I feel that if I don't do the very things that we teach others, it's probably not very real. I try to make sure my own life represents that.

**What is the most humorous and bizarre coaching experience you've had?**

I had an opportunity to work with Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini and he was fighting Hector "Macho" Camacho for the title. It's a unique story because 4 years before that fight, Ray had actually been in the ring, and by his own hand, he had killed a Korean fighter. Ray went into a dark depression, he had flashbacks, couldn't go in the ring anymore. He was a pretty religious guy and felt that this was unthinkable. Ray eventually decided to come out and fight the fight that he had always wanted to fight, which was "Macho" Camacho. So they put this fight in Vegas and this was Ray's chance to get the demons out and begin training.

They called me to come to Vegas to assist and spend time with him because he was having flashbacks and awful time trying to get the death out of his mind. Ray was afraid he couldn't do it. So I would accompany him to hotel room at Caesar's Palace; he'd just come off a brutal practice session with one of his sparring partners and he would be bloodied, literally beat to a pulp.

We'd go to his room and Ray would sit back where he had a television, a VCR, and a big stack of videotapes. They were laugh tapes. He would plop himself down, put the tape in, sit back and start laughing. He would laugh hysterically until he fell asleep. I'd watch him there and he'd do this every single day. Ray explained to me that this is how he healed and that he learned this from his father, who was also a boxer. This was one of his secrets. Ray learned that there was something very powerful about humor and accelerating his ability to tolerate all of the wear and tear and training he was going through. What looked to be so bizarre was actually his highly effective way to gain recovery, and Ray did it in the form of humor. I've never forgotten that.

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Business Inquiries: [rene@renevidal.com](mailto:rene@renevidal.com)