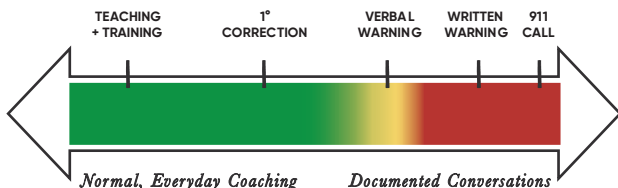


COACHING

THE COACHING CONTINUUM

We see leadership as progressive and continual, so we often talk about coaching as a continuum:



Instead of relying on annual performance reviews, we believe in coaching and continuous feedback as a lifestyle. Our goal is to “live in the green,” which is normal, everyday coaching, and includes training, teaching, encouraging, and correcting. That doesn’t mean we won’t ever find ourselves in the yellow or red. *In any corrective conversation, our goal is to represent God’s heart to reconcile and restore.* The purpose is not to cover ourselves legally while we show someone out the door. *We’re doing it to help them stay!*

The majority of people on our senior leadership team can recall a time they’d personally been “in the red” while at our company. Not only did they survive, they grew from it. Corrective conversations are too often viewed as adversarial and fraught with nervous negotiation or focused on legal documentation rather than clear communication delivered in love. Most people

genuinely want to succeed, and the best way to allow them to do that is to give them clear direction and regular information about how they're doing.

Training & Teaching

Part of our relational leadership style is being closely engaged with our people in their work. We want to understand what they're dealing with and identify gaps we can help them with. As their leader, our job is to help them be successful. We are constantly in "teaching mode" as we walk alongside them. We believe in progressive development through conversation as we go, not occasionally passing them a list of things they did wrong. If our people are our mission, we should be engaged daily with them. We shouldn't just send them, we should go with them! Great leaders don't tell us what to do, they show us how it's done. But, "being engaged" isn't a license to micromanage. We should ensure our people have everything they need to do the job, and

"Most of life is on-the-job training. Some of the most important things can only be learned in the process of doing them. You do something and you get feedback — about what works and what doesn't."

— Jack Canfield

then let them do it.

Our charge as leaders is to see people for what they could be and raise them up to their God-given potential. We must intentionally think about the growth of each individual on our team. Here are some good questions to consider:

- What does "going to the next level" look like for that person?
- How can we expand their territory?
- What is the biggest thing holding them back?
- When are they ready for that next challenge?

Growth can mean a lot of things; it doesn't always mean promotion or leadership. More often it's about finding ways to expand their current role. What do they love about their job? What part makes their eyes light up? Can they take on more responsibility or pioneer a new effort in that area?

And remember, people need to be reminded more than instructed. "Great leaders see themselves as Chief Reminding Officers as much as anything else," explains Patrick Lencioni. Many leaders don't enjoy the reminding role because it seems inefficient, but when we remind people of something, it helps them understand we're committed to it and view it as important. Many leaders fail to remind people because they get bored saying the same thing over and over again. This is understandable, but the point of leadership is not to keep the leader entertained, but mobilize people around what is most important. When that calls for repetition and reinforcement, which it almost always does, a good leader welcomes that responsibility.³⁹

And remember, we're trying to grow them for their benefit. Someone might ask, "But when you grow them, don't you benefit too?" Perhaps, but it depends. In some cases,

³⁹ (LENCIONI, P143)

we've helped people grow to a point where they left to start their own company or pursue a dream in a different industry. That could be what success looks like in growing someone. In the Kingdom, it isn't about us! These are God's people, not our people. They aren't just human resources we leverage for profit! God has entrusted them to us to love and shepherd for His purpose.

1° Corrections

Two friends are going on a long hike together. They start off heading in the same direction, but eventually one of them begins to drift off by just 1°. It's such a slight difference that it's hard to even notice at first, but if they continue like that they'll eventually end up so far apart they can't even see each other. If they'd caught it back when they were only a foot apart, they could have easily come back together. But the longer it goes unaddressed, the more dramatic the correction will need to be to reunite.

When we say 1° corrections, we're talking about tiny adjustments we notice and want to close the gap on. Our desire is to go on long journeys with everyone here, so we're committed to saying something about issues before they have a chance to grow into something significant.

We see 1° corrections as "in the green," and a natural part of everyday coaching. They're a quick, 30-60 second coaching moment delivered in an as-we-go fashion. Great

leaders know their audience and skillfully apply the lightest amount of force necessary to grab that person's attention and close the gap. If we have close relationships with our people, 1° corrections may feel more like advice than correction. They're about coaching, not punishing.

For example, we might pull someone aside after a meeting and say, "Hey, I noticed in the past two team meetings you haven't shared in the discussion. You may not realize this, but you have a lot of influence, and when you don't verbalize what you're thinking it makes others less likely to share. As the veteran on the team, I need your help. What do you think you could do differently next time?"

These should be clear and concise. The SBIN tool can help with that. We try to hit on these elements when giving a 1°:

Situation: Describe the specific situation.

Behavior: Describe the person's behavior (i.e., physical, observable action).

Impact: Share the impact their behavior had on them, you, or others.

Next Time Opportunity: Invite them to identify what they'll do differently next time, so they're part of the change and you gain active commitment.

The key to 1° corrections are that they're timely, meaning they happen the same day. We prefer for these to be in private (just the two of you) and face-to-face. There may be times that can't happen, but they should always be

live and interactive. If you're managing at a distance, call them or video conference – *never correct someone via email or text message.*

Before you make a correction, always think about how you'd feel if someone told you the same thing. How can you say it in a way that helps them receive it? A tenured pilot for a major airline told me pilots are constantly doing course corrections during a flight, hundreds of them. Having to correct course doesn't mean the pilot is bad – it actually means they're doing their job. The pilot's role is to continually bring the plane back on course so it arrives at its destination. It's the same for leadership. We must have our eyes open, be aware, and make course corrections. If we see a correction that needs to be made and don't help someone by pointing it out, we aren't loving that person well and we become a silent accomplice in the continuance of that issue.

When is it more than a 1° correction?

- If we have bullet points (i.e., addressing multiple issues)
- When it's not a blind spot (i.e., they know what they are doing isn't right)
- If we're wondering whether we should document it

Often when we find ourselves in the yellow or red, we can look back and see times we should've done 1° corrections. It's so easy to make excuses, like "the timing isn't right", "they're already aware of it", "they've made some improvement", "this is a gray area", and the list

goes on. But, the better we become at recognizing and making 1° corrections, the less we'll find ourselves in the yellow or red. A common management dilemma is not addressing employee problems in a timely manner. When corrective feedback isn't provided in a timely fashion, and instead is unexpectedly piled on at a later date, people feel blindsided and upset. "No surprises" is a cornerstone of good leadership, and the key is continuous, timely feedback.

Documented Conversations

We don't have these more serious conversations because we're building a case for why someone should be fired. *We're having these conversations to help them stay!* The posture and approach that comes out of those two motivations couldn't be more different.

In any corrective conversation, our role is to represent God's heart to reconcile and restore. "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and *gave us the ministry of reconciliation*," says 2 Corinthians 5:18. The ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to us. People don't drift into unity or healthiness. It doesn't happen by chance. It only happens if we accept our responsibility and take an active role in bringing it about.

We want to love people well, and while some wouldn't naturally think of these conversations as loving, they are. Proverbs 13:24 says, "Whoever spares the rod *hates* their children, but the one who *loves* their children is careful to discipline them." If you fail to correct and discipline someone under your leadership, not only is it not loving them – it's *hating* them. That's strong! Every major translation uses that exact word: *hate*. The King James Version says it this way: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth

him chasteneth him betimes." The definition of chasteneth is "to temporarily inflict pain for the purpose of reclaiming the offender." It is for their benefit, with the goal of restoration. Betimes means "before the usual or expected time; early." *Therefore, we're hating our people if we aren't willing to correct and discipline for the sake of restoration, and do that early or before what is typical in the rest of the world.*

Remember this doesn't have to be adversarial; it's about helping them become successful here.

Getting to the Root

One of the most important parts of these conversations is the meeting-before-the-meeting where you and your leader think through the issues you've noticed in order to diagnose the root cause. A good doctor's goal isn't treating symptoms, but addressing the underlying cause. Typically when you find yourself in the yellow or red, there may be lots of things that have you concerned or even frustrated. Look at each one and ask: Why are they doing that? Where could the disconnect be? What would cause them to act that way? It's our responsibility to sort through exactly what is bothering us about their behavior, identify common themes, and boil it down to the root issue. *Nobody can work on more than one or two major things at one time, so you must get it down to the one or two root issues that are the biggest threat to their job.*

Sometimes when you get to this level, you may uncover that the issue is they simply aren't a functional fit for the role. It could have been a mistake in hiring or promotion, the role may have outgrown

them, or their circumstances changed. If they can't do that job, could they be successful in another role? It's easy to squint on this front, especially when you love them, so we think through this carefully. First, do we still believe they're a cultural fit? Is there a role open they could thrive in? Would you be thrilled to get that person on your team if you were the other manager? Finally, would you be willing to put your reputation on the line for them? If there is hesitation on any of those questions, we'd be doing them a disservice by moving them to another role.

More often, the issue isn't about functional fit or simple behavior modification, but a heart issue. *The most common root causes are typically related to one of these areas: unity, growth, excellence, generosity, attitude, submission, trust, or humility.*

Here's an example of how that diagnosis discussion might go. Let's say you and your leader identify six symptoms that are issues. Through conversation, you uncover three of those are directly related to a poor attitude. Two other symptoms center around a trust issue between the employee and a teammate. After discussion, you might decide the remaining issue of the six you identified is unrelated and not nearly as important, so you both decide to consciously set that one aside for the moment in order to put all your focus on the two major issues that could cost them their job if unaddressed.

The final step is to decide the best way to articulate the root issue(s) using a few key words that they'll understand and can use to recognize similar moments and self-correct in the future. Provide enough detail and examples for the employee to get a clear picture of what you mean, but not too much that it overwhelms them. We never want to bludgeon someone with the truth.

Our Role & Theirs

We bring clarity: Any time we're having one of these major conversations, one of our primary duties is to bring clarity. We want to ensure we're on the same page with that person on how important the issue is and our expectations moving forward. Do they know where they stand? If we slid the coaching continuum diagram in front of them and asked them to point at where they believe they're at, would we agree? It's about eliminating confusion. And that goes both ways; we don't want them to think something is heavier than it really is, but we also don't want them to think something isn't a big deal when it could cost them their job. Remember, *no surprises!*

They bring commitment: The responsibility of the person we're talking with is to acknowledge there is a problem, own their part of it, and commit to change. To have real hope for improvement, they must admit they need to change. If they don't agree there is a problem, can't take personal responsibility, or aren't able to provide a sincere commitment to change then any hope of the situation getting better is simply wishful, and therefore they can't continue. Some people may need a day or two to go home and reflect, but we can't allow them to rejoin the team until they bring clear and absolute commitment to change.

Three Types of Documented Conversations

Verbal Warning: These are for corrections that are more than 1° but still minor enough that making them sign a formal document would be far too heavy-handed. A verbal warning is a specialized tool, and we must be thoroughly convinced it's the right tool before we use it. If we're wondering if it should be a verbal or a written warning, it should absolutely be written.

We do tell the person we'll be documenting the conversation and sending it to HR to put in their file. We don't send the employee a copy, unless they ask for one. It's helpful to create talking points beforehand to organize our thoughts and ensure we communicate clearly, and then we can simply email those to HR afterward along with facts about how the employee responded.

Written Warning: These are for when we need to see dramatic improvement in an area over a reasonable period of time. The tone of these conversations might sound like this: "This subject is important, but please understand me: we are not in an emergency here. There are no secret agents cleaning out your office while you're in here. Are you with me? What I am saying, is that over a reasonable period of time we need to see dramatic improvement in this area. The only thing I'm needing today is your strong commitment to improvement. Deal?"⁴⁰ They should feel an appropriate amount of pressure, but not like they're being interrogated and prepared for dismissal. Putting it in writing and giving them a copy gives them a chance to review it later to ensure they understand and remember what we discussed. Asking for a signature helps them understand the seriousness of the issue. During these conversations, it's best to start with the paperwork face-down, talk through the situation so they hear our heart, and then present the paperwork as a summary of what we just shared. A formal follow-up is scheduled on the calendar one week out to come back together to ensure we're on the same page with the progress they're making. We should repeat those scheduled follow-ups until we both agree the issue is behind us and they're back in the green.

⁴⁰ (HYBELS, LEADERSHIP AXIOMS, P17)

911 Call: This is a special type of written warning, where we require *immediate turnaround*. In this case, we have zero tolerance for a repeat offense. In these moments, we suggest adding a senior leader to the meeting-before-the-meeting, to get wise council and make every effort to create the best clarity. In these heavier conversations, it can be a lot for the person to process and they're likely only going to remember a few sentences from our conversation, so we want to intentionally select a couple of accurate phrases of note and repeat those. In the conversation we must be direct and unambiguous about the seriousness of the issue, so we might say, "This is your 911 call. What we're dealing with right here, right now, carries with it the top level of urgency and importance. If your behavior doesn't change *immediately* you'll be asked to leave our staff. This is what I want you to remember when you walk out of the room today: Nine-one-one. Are we clear?"⁴¹ In these situations there should also be follow-ups scheduled on the calendar, but, if it is this serious, it is typically more appropriate for those to be daily for some time before we transition to weekly follow-ups.

Wrapping It Up

Ideally this is a progressive process, but where someone is on the continuum depends on the circumstances. As system-builders, we'd love for this to always follow a clean, predetermined process, but loving people well requires us to adapt to the specifics of the situation. There are times when the best thing for the person is to jump straight to a written warning or even a 911 call. For example, if someone is being divisive, that is something that has to change immediately. If we blindly follow this as a linear process, we can hurt people

⁴¹ (HYBELS, LEADERSHIP AXIOMS, P17)

by not being honest about how critical the issue is and what our expectations are. We're trying to apply the appropriate amount of force to help them make the correction necessary so we can come back together. Remember, *no surprises!*

There is only one rule when it comes to these major conversations: never do it alone. Unlike 1° corrections which are done in the moment without the need to collaborate beforehand, *anything in the yellow or red we must seek wise counsel and talk through it with our leader before we go into the conversation.*

For yellow conversations, you and your leader can decide whether you will deliver the message together or if it's more appropriate for you to do that alone. However, in red conversations you should always have your leader by your side when you meet with the employee (or another senior leader, if your leader is unavailable). That second person with you adds support, helps ensure the communication is clear, and provides another perspective on how we can help reconcile and restore that family member as a healthy part of the team.

Whether people respond and make the change or not largely depends on whether we believe they will. That's something we just can't fake. People are so good at sensing whether their leader is for them or not. If they believe we're against them, they won't receive it.

If we are sure things can't be restored, we should be having a totally different type of conversation with them – about termination, not correction. Sometimes we realize it's hopeless because we should have had these more serious corrective

conversations some time ago, and by not doing that we're to blame for their failure as much as they are. We must learn from that, but that doesn't mean we can ignore the present reality and wipe the slate clean or give them a reset. The past cannot be rewritten. The decision on how to move forward must be made from an honest assessment of whether more effort and time will bring about a different result, or are we simply being wishful. Based on where we stand today, what is the next right action for them, the team, and everyone involved?

If we still believe they have it in them to turn it around and be successful here, we must tell them that! Tell them we care about them, and we're not trying to run them off – we're trying to help them stay! They have the power at any given moment to say, "This is not how the story is going to end." Anyone who is successful here long-term has come to that moment, and not only survived it, but grown from it. That's what we're hoping for every step of the way.