

Coaching Tool: The Ladder of Inference

Transcript

Appearing

In order of appearance:

1. MAJ David Stephens
2. MAJGEN Roger Powell (Retd)

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MAJ David Stephens Another tool that coaches might think about using, as a way to enhance their coaching interactions with their coaching counterparts is a thing called the 'Ladder of Inference'. Can you talk to us a little bit about what that is and how a coach might use that in a coaching interaction?

MAJGEN Roger Powell (Retd) Thanks, Dave. I think, any of us who've done, coaching have a, what I would call, virtual tool bag of mental models. And you know there's the driver, there's the putter, there's the chippers and the fairway irons. And the 'Ladder of Inference' sits is a pretty important tool in my golf bag. Virtual golf bag. And it's because of the very nature of the way, we think. And it's based on our beliefs. So when we make judgments, we tend to make them based on our belief system. And we make inferences that in many cases, need to be tested. And so when you got a coaching counterpart, there is generally going to be opinion expressed that needs to be tested.

'I'm anxious about, exams coming up'.

'Okay. Well, can you explain that to me?'

So, you need to tease that out. And because we tend, in a conceptual sense, to be at the top of a 'Ladder of Inference' where, we are making judgments and jumping to conclusions that might not necessarily have veracity. And so by using the technique of drawing the coaching counterpart down the ladder to mine for data specific examples and being curious about what you might be missing or the coaching counterpart might be missing in terms of what you're hearing, he or she say, is a technique that is built around the 'Ladder of Inference'. And the key to it is to get to a point where you share, he said, I said, this is what it made me feel. So, you've got specific, very clear examples of what the belief is based on, or what the inference is based on, is what the 'Ladder of Inference' is all about. And I use it all the time.

MAJ David Stephens Okay. Perhaps could you give us a quick example, say I'm a training officer who, you know, coaching sessions says something like I don't know, 'Everyone in the division hates me. I don't want to be at the academy anymore. I've had enough'.

How would you use the 'Ladder of Inference' to have a conversation, to organize it?



MAJGEN
Roger Powell
(Retd)

So, you've just said that to me and I'm coaching you. I'd say, 'Dave. can you give me some examples of what you mean by everybody hates you?' And then from that point on, you might say to me, 'Well the other day, they all went out for a beer, and I wasn't asked'. And so, 'Okay. Can we just take that little scenario and, and unpackage it a bit more?' And so, you get to a point where, they probably don't hate them. They are probably not even aware that individual thinks that he or she's hated. But you're drawing them down to specific conversations that they had that will allow them to draw the conclusion that they were hated and that the place was really against them. And what they might do to combat those emotional negativities and how they might say to whoever was involved in not taking them out for... won't have included them... for a beer asking the question of their counterpart. 'I was really interested about the fact that I wasn't included in the drinks the other day. Can you just tease out for me why I was left out?' So that they can actually get to a point where you're dealing with the behaviours that have driven their feeling of rejection. Does that make sense?

MAJ David
Stephens

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. That's really helpful to sort of contextualize it. And I guess a lot of our coaching conversations are really about questioning some of those assumptions. It's about trying to dig below what might be a surface level comment to find out what's really going on.

MAJGEN
Roger Powell
(Retd)

And it links back to the filters that we've already talked about. So, what you're attempting to do is to get to a point where you're right at the kernel, right at the heart of why someone is feeling anxious about whatever the issue is. And as a general rule, what is, on the coated on the outside, has a different look and feel once you get to the centre of the issue. And that's what coaching is all about. It's getting to that nub of a problem and what you might be able to do to help the coaching counterpart see it from a different angle. So, it's a mutual learning journey where you're try to get to a point where you can help the coaching counterpart see a different way of tackling something that is a bit of a speed bump in their existence in the process.

MAJ David
Stephens

Yeah. Thanks for all that's really useful.

