

LEADERSHIP COACHING GROUPS (LCG)

Background Notes

This program evolved over time and the content of www.HOUD.info/LCG-Overview.pdf and www.HOUD.info/LCG-Syllabus.pdf condenses the salient points to descriptive documents. This section is added to gather together various thoughts, digressions, issues, sidebars and other supplemental material that may support understanding and explaining the essence and reasoning underlying Leadership Coping Groups. These groups are offered as an alternative to the *protocol-driven* “solutions” that have and still do make management fads and fashions so popular. I elaborated this in an the essay www.HOUD.info/Fads.pdf, listing a hundred *codified methods du jour*. One does not lead by following “cookbooks.”

The prescribed method of the day may have worked successfully in some situation and garnered a following to spread the word. But many confuse “painting by the numbers” with art. Growing up in the post-war years, I saw many people proudly hanging kit paintings on their livingroom walls. WWII’s legacy: hierarchy, obedience, planning, and standard operating procedures became culturally infused. It is ironic that GIs coined the abbreviation SNAFU. These kits may provide some insight into composition at a level below Picasso’s admonition to “Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.” LCG provides exposure and discusses many protocols as a foundation for the *art* of leadership.

Leaders have long been recognized as important to the success of organizations and for the most part were lauded in reports throughout time. It is fairly recently that there has been a focus on incompetence and the downside of leadership. I addressed the distribution of incompetence in www.HOUD.info/ruleofthumb.pdf. Although the literature began to surface in the 1990s, Dixon’s *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* dates back to 1976. It is not surprising that leaders were lauded for so long because they sometimes took on the mantle of deity and if not yielded power over life and death; power often inherited or taken by force. Ivy’s academic pedigree greases advancement in democratic societies.

Credentials and pedigrees are often important and may provide a necessary foundation for providing professional service. Besides having advanced degrees in engineering, business administration, and clinical psychology, I obtained state licenses in professional engineering, school psychology, and clinical psychology. Much of my time is spent looking through scholarly literature (which is quite easy with full-text academic databases and a flash drive memory stick). Nevertheless, I do not lobby for certified coaches, academicians, trainers, or teachers to “lead” these groups. The suitable “leader” has digested all the written material beforehand, does not proselytize a particular academic leadership “theology,” and the temperament to let the individuals and group have its own “solutions.”

These coach leaders are not easy to find because people tend to be secure working with canned approaches. For this reason, this material is offered freely as a guide for those who see some value in the approach. To set up and sell a training, supervision, and certification

program would direct me into codifying acceptable protocols. That would defeat the basic philosophy underlying the groups. It was decided to use the name coach as the facilitator in the spirit in which I have used the term: www.HOUD.info/coachNames.pdf. They are not as passive as I described yeomen: www.HOUD.info/yeoman.pdf. Herein, the coach is not transparent and initially will ask questions, give interpretations, summarize material, and encourage all to participate. By the end, he or she will disengage from providing directives.

LCG taps into resources that are generated in a group. Material presented is available to all participants and not be presented by an expert. The coach assists in getting the group to work together, avoid scapegoats, and urges the members to share their own opinions.

Goals for the participants, facilitated by the group's coach, include:

- Maximize Existing Talents
- Development of Interpersonal Skills
- Enhance Life and Career Goals
- Focus on Present and Future Events
- Self-sufficiency in Analyzing Writings
- Shared Objectives with Group Colleagues
- "See Ourselves as Others See Us"
- Better Influence People
- Human Relations Skills
- Professional Development

This takes time and effort. Thus, groups meet for 18 weeks, every other week. Prompt and full attendance is expected for two-hour meetings. If an alternate-week schedule — that should be published in advance — cannot be fully accommodated, do not start the group.

Leadership involves human relations and the group provides the environment where each member increases understanding of himself or herself by receiving non-threatening feedback from other group members. Group members are ideally selected from non-competing companies to keep the process open and honest and not jeopardize your job. In reality, however, most of these groups formulate around organizations where the members have outside relationships. As these are human development and not therapy groups, discretion, not anonymity and confidentiality, are expected in and out of meetings.

Although not therapy, there are some rules that carryover that it is helpful to observe:

- On time for full time every time
- Common courtesy expected
- No cell phones
- Leaves limited to bathroom breaks
- Behavior displayed in group discussed
- No physical contact between members
- Emotions expressed verbally
- No physical outbreaks
- No outside competition between members

Some helpful jottings follow and future coaches are encouraged to send me their notes on process. This is freely offered, without restrictions, and it would be helpful to get feedback.

rabstejnek@HOUD.info

JOTTINGS

Regular and committed participation is necessary. It takes two uninterrupted hours of attendance every other week (*without cell phones*) and a few hours reading and writing, done during the two weeks between meetings. Failure to do this undermines your effectiveness for the group and yourself. *Commitment and independent prep. is necessary!*

The fixed length contract is sufficiently long to promote change and growth. It is often helpful to have an end date, as termination motivates work and change.

The group is a place to bring current good and bad leadership issues in the workplace — reaching upward, downward, and sideward. The sharing principle is called “here-and now,” and taps into relevant issues. As it is not therapy, childhood history is excluded.

Multiple perspectives and solutions will be considered. For this reason, and others, group members need to be open and honest to the extent overlapping competitive roles outside the group are not jeopardized. (This is why it is better to have non-competing strangers comprise the group). Realistically, it is not always possible to arrange such a group.

A chapter will be read for each session from a book that covers the plethora of leadership theories, models, and methods. Supplementary readings will be copied from professional and academic journals, and credible business magazines — providing a cross-section of literature sources. No particular approach to leadership will be advocated. Each individual is free to develop a personally congruent and situationally appropriate leadership style.

The readings were selected to provide exposure to several sources. Some are classics and should be part of a leader’s repertoire and others were selected to provide variety in thoughts, approaches, and sources. All are in full-text databases, so are readily and freely accessible to students, with access to contracting college libraries. As they are copyrighted, there are organizations that will compile copies into booklets and pay royalties, for a fee.

Single paragraphs will be written between sessions and read to the group at a meeting. The various perspectives will be discussed. This will enhance ability to draw the essence from serious literature and succinctly frame personal ideas in a professional framework. It is important that paragraphs be written in advance, as “winging it” serves no purpose.

Unlike many classes, the writings are not a private communication between teacher and student, even if adapted to a college class. Leaders make decisions that are public so these writings are to be shared with the group.

These didactic activities will provide the foundation from which the group process will proceed. Through exchange of ideas and reactions, personality styles and human relationships will be enhanced. Unlike therapy, the discussion are focused on assignments.

It is believed that effective leaders, while well aware of popular protocols but do not lead mechanistically. Nevertheless, they need a solid foundation, poignantly proffered by Picasso: “Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.”

I use the term coach because it has become economically popular and has so many meanings. I covered this in www.HOUD.info/coachNames.pdf. Many institutes train and certify “by the book” coaches. It is also a term that is used by both artisans and artists. Adaptation to protocols is also considered by experienced physicians and psychotherapists who are rigidly taught but use them judiciously as guidance with *individuals* in practice.

We need competent leaders, particularly since more than half of the present crop are incompetent (www.HOUD.info/ruleofthumb.pdf). We believe that practitioners and potential candidates can improve their abilities with exposure to knowledge, while creating a reluctance to “follow the fads.” Merely warning, however, does not usually fundamentally change cognition and behavior. The interpersonal interaction with a group over time considering various viewpoints *might* change how one operates in the real world.

Peter F. Drucker’s paper, “Your Leadership Is Unique,” is published in pdf format on the Internet. It includes two statements relevant to this program

The lessons are unambiguous.

[1] The first is that there may be “born leaders,” but there surely are far too few to depend on them. Leadership must be learned and can be learned.

For our purposes, herein, we focus on the word learned, as opposed to taught.

[2] The second major lesson is that “leadership personality,” “leadership style,” and “leadership traits” do not exist.

Herein, we are focusing on knowledge and not charisma, which is not a universal trait.

I offer this approach freely because it does not lend itself to a marketable book or DVD, because to do so would require “canning” the material. This is a process, albeit with structure, and not a protocol. I suppose a textbook could offer my interpretations of the papers but that would be teaching and circumventing group discovery (and there are no correct answers). Besides. Yukl has compiled an excellent compendium of approaches.

Of course, there is a time and place for protocols. My dissertation used trait theory to evaluate leadership at a military college. The situation determines the approach.

Two profound sources point to this. Notably, Kenny Rogers and Ecclesiastes (3:1). To wit:

“Know when to hold them, Know when to fold them.” (The Gambler)

“To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

As there are no “right” scholarly answers, a suitable member of the community can moderate the group. Academics could be a good source of group “coaches,” as many having read broadly, if they are willing to be open-minded and not directive. The purpose is not to hobble the leader but to encourage them to not hobble the participants, either.

Free (unrestricted) Internet access is provided in the hope of reaching the practicing community, because there is a great need for competent leaders. There are a multitude of how-to programs being sold, for those wanting mechanistic approaches to leadership.

This is a knowledge-based process being shared with the Web Community.
It would be helpful to receive feedback from users at rabstejnek@HOUD.info.