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Social Responsibility Through Coaching

How coaching is
transforming the lives
of the vulnerable

Coaching Leaders
in Nonprofits

Social Entrepreneurs &
Leadership Coaching

Helping the Helpers

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The value of not-for-profit coaching

Where is coaching provided to the not-for-profit sector and what is the impact? What are the differences in engagement with not-for-profits vs. for-profits? How does coaching inform and challenge the vision of the social profit sector? Does it help the sector in advancing a strengths-based approach to clients, recognizing their clients as the experts in their own lives? This issue explores how coaching in the not-for-profit sector is transforming the lives of the vulnerable.

Coming Together in Battle Creek

Coaching as a powerful tool for addressing community challenges

By Deborah Howard, Esq., PCC, MSOD

What happens when coaching skills become integrated in the work of community members coming together to tackle community challenges?

The community of Battle Creek, Michigan found out when local organizations and funders engaged in a collaborative effort to provide coaching skills training to various social service organizations. They had no idea that their work would spark a community-wide effort to increase racial equity in that city.

The work started when Early Childhood Connections (ECC), an organization that helps parents better prepare their children for school, received funding to use a “coaching model” as part of an innovative program to provide resources and support to families. Every family with a newborn is given the option of signing up to get a “family coach” to work with them until their child reaches four years of age and is ready to start school.

These family coaches are community-based workers, not professionally trained coaches (although some have gone on to become certified coaches). Leadership that Works (LTW), a coaching certification training organization, was brought in to provide training in coaching skills. Through the Coaching for Community Transformation (CCT) program, they helped these family coaches explore ways to apply coaching skills to more effectively serve their constituents.

The training consists of learning basic coaching skills, such as asking empowering questions, listening deeply, and engaging in difficult conversations. Participants learn that, as family coaches, their role is not to “fix” anything; rather their role is to partner with families to help them discover their own solutions to the challenges they face. As a result, these family coaches come to their clients not as experts tell-

ing them what to do, but as coaches who support them in identifying their own strengths, making their own choices, and taking responsibility and actions to achieve their goals.

As ECC began to see the empowering nature of this approach, they invited their own staff members and their community partners to attend their trainings. By integrating

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coaching skills into their work, these community workers found that they are able to:

- Develop stronger, more productive partnerships with their clients;
- Release the weight and responsibility of trying to solve their clients’ problems; and
- Help their clients address and overcome their challenges.

Over time, ECC invited increasingly more community organizations and individuals to participate in the coaching skills training in an effort to integrate this coaching model throughout the Battle Creek community. They strategically targeted organizations and individuals who had influence in the commu-



nity, were doing similar kinds of work, and supported ECC's mission. As a result, a wide range of individuals from social services organizations in the Battle Creek community, including social workers, mental health workers, health workers, volunteers, educators, funders, executive directors and board members, started integrating coaching skills into their interactions with their constituents and within their own organizations.

This meant that community-based organizations from across the city began to use a coaching approach in the way they offer direct services and work with the populations they serve. Using this method, they provide clients with skills to better advocate

for themselves and reach their goals.

The individuals who participated in LTW's CCT training were so taken with the coaching approach that when the W.K. Kellogg Foundation funded the creation of the Center for Diversity and Innovation (CDI) to promote racial equity in Battle Creek, they advocated for coaching skills training to be included in that grant. Therefore, in addition to other programming and educational opportunities, CDI coordinates the coaching skills training provided by LTW that supports racial equity work.

An unforeseen benefit of these trainings is the diversity

of the individuals who participate. Attendees come from different races, cultures, and classes, as well as from a wide range of organizations and positions in Battle Creek. These include nonprofit organizations, local school districts, the fire department, faith-

The focus is on supporting leaders to make changes in policies and practices that support an organizational climate and culture that is truly equitable.

based groups, as well as individuals such as civic leaders, retirees, and city council members.

The CCT coaching skills training integrates racial equity into the curriculum and gives participants the opportunity to practice coaching skills in cross-race, cross-cultural, cross-class and cross-organizational pairings. By working together in this experiential training, these community members learn the skills needed to dialogue, often for the first time, about current racial equity issues in Battle Creek. Participants leave with new skills and rich cross-cultural experiences that prepare them to use these skills throughout the community in support of racial equity.

One community member who participated in both racial equity and coaching skills trainings explained how the CCT

program effectively promotes racial equity. He said, “When I completed the racial equity training, I learned a lot and my awareness had increased, but I had no idea how to put what I learned into practice. Through the review and application of coaching skills, listening to those who are different from me and being curious, now I know how to have difficult conversations across race about issues of racial equity.”

Virginia Kellogg, one of the original LTW coach trainers, points out why CCT trainings have such significant impact: “As part of LTW’s training, participants practice coaching with each other, which involves working on real issues in their lives, organizations and the community. We discovered that this breaks down all sorts of silos that have been in the community for a long time. In addition to giving people the skills they need to have difficult conversations about race and equity, the CCT training enables participants to develop authentic relationships across race, class, cultures and organizations.”

CDI is now working to better integrate the racial equity and coaching skills training programs, seeing them both as essential parts of enhancing racial equity in the community. The most recent example is the Leading for Transformation Equity Workshop being held for organizational and institutional leaders throughout the city. The focus is on supporting leaders to make changes in policies and practices that support an organizational climate and culture that is truly equitable. In each session of the workshop, leaders learn and practice coaching skills. Integrating coaching skills into the equity work provides participants with tools that support the conversations and interpersonal connections that are essential to create sustainable organizational and community change. Each leader also benefits from

five coaching sessions to support them in their planning for and implementation of equity practices.

Jorge Zeballos, executive director of CDI, sees coaching skills as “a powerful tool in helping individuals think through issues of racial equity in a non-threatening way and in ways that open up the possibility of considering issues they have not considered before. It became clear to me that it is critical to engage in these hard conversations and help others see why racial equity is important, using open inquiry rather than pointing fingers or blaming.”

In a small community like Battle Creek, as more people go through these trainings, they are increasingly able to work together more collaboratively not only across organizations and agencies, but across race, culture and class

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throughout the community. Coaching skills training provides the foundation required to help this community imagine what is possible when diverse groups of individuals have the skills they need to work together to more effectively tackle the challenges of creating racial equity. ●