



# Bonus Principles for Good Coaching (and Good Living)

Here's your reward for reading this far: power principles that will raise you from the ranks of the merely excellent to the brilliant.

## **The Principle of Getting Started: It Doesn't Matter Where You Start**

It only matters *that* you start.

Action often must precede understanding and almost always comes before certainty.

Don't wait for a problem to develop and grow before you start applying the techniques we've explored in the first 14 chapters. Don't wait to be inspired. Don't wait for insight. Don't wait, period. Start anywhere. Work your way toward inspiration and insight.

On any given project, get involved in your coaching right up front, helping your employees define the problem, develop the approach, and create the action plan. Much better to start

out strong and smart and together than to try to untangle the problem later. The time you spend at the front end of the project will return to you twofold in the problems you don't have to solve and the explanations you don't have to make later.

### **The Principle of Control: You Can't Control Anybody**

You can motivate them. You can direct their energies. You can teach them, lead them, praise them, and guide them.

But you can't control them—and you wouldn't want to if you could. You don't want compliant slaves. You want effective, independent workers.

When you evaluate workers' performance and related workplace behaviors, put your perceptions to this test:

“Is what they're doing *wrong*, or is it just *different*?”

Too many supervisors manage by the “my way or the highway” standard. They generally view differences as a threat to their authority.

You'll waste a lot of time and engender a lot of anger and resentment making people undo and redo things they did fine but different.

Part of your job as a coach is to learn your workers' individual work styles and to allow as much as possible for people to do it their way—as long as you get the result you want, when you want it.

No threats. No chains. Just clear explanations of mutual goals.

### **The Principle of Decisions: Make Them—Promptly**

“Not to decide is to decide,” theologian Harvey Cox said.

If you fail to make a decision, you decide by default. You also abandon your role as leader and turn the fate of your project over to the prevailing wind.

Deciding not to act may be a valid choice. But failing to decide never is. Get as much information as you can. Cast your net wide for possible courses of action. Weigh carefully but quickly. Then decide.

Haste makes waste? Sometimes. But waiting makes nothing. Waste is a natural result of productivity. Throw away the waste, and you're left with your solution.

## **The Principle of Time: Don't Waste It**

Don't waste time—yours or theirs. Sure, that's easier said than done. But you can make a big difference by avoiding these pervasive time eaters.

### **Memo Mania**

Are you sure you have to write it down?

If you really have to write it down—no doubt so that somebody can file it—don't try to make your employees read it unless it's really necessary. And don't assume they know what's in it just because you sent it to them.

Make sure the message is worth the ink and paper, then follow up to make sure employees got it and understand it.

### **Info Glut**

Computers have made it possible to access virtually any information source in the galaxy—if you can find it. We're all drowning in information, learning to put off decisions while we gather ever more data.

- Don't mistake information for knowledge.
- Don't mistake knowledge for wisdom.
- Don't mistake wisdom for an informed decision that gets the project moving.

Just because you can get the information doesn't mean you have to get it. Apply commonsense, reasonable guidelines, and set a time limit for "surfing the 'Net."

### **Meeting Menace**

People don't hate meetings.

They hate nonsense. They hate wasting their time. They hate listening to someone read a list of announcements to them, when they could have selectively read (and skipped) them much faster themselves. And they really loathe spending

a precious hour discussing an issue that matters to them, only to find out that a decision has already been made.

Hold meetings only for necessary interactions that can't take place any other way. Plan every meeting by setting an agenda. Circulate discussion items and needed information ahead of time. And run meetings tightly.

### **Multiple Management**

To the extent that you have the power to make it happen, make sure workers report to one and only one supervisor for any given project. Having to report to two bosses is a sure time-waster. Define lines of responsibility and authority clearly and publicly. Don't pass the management buck, and don't let anybody else pass it, either.

### **Marilyn Monroe Complex**

Don't make people wait. It's bad manners, and it's inefficient and ineffective managing.

Don't make an appointment you can't keep. Don't show up late for any meeting, especially if you're going to be running it. Don't make anybody wait on the phone while you take another call.

Making people wait wastes their time—and it insults them. It conveys the clear message that you consider what you're doing to be a lot more important than interacting with them.

If you can't help being late, make sure you apologize to the group, quickly and sincerely. If you must explain, keep it short.

### **Trivial Pursuit**

Effective time managers learn to ask themselves the Lakein Question (named for Alan Lakein, the progenitor of modern time management techniques): "Do I want or need to be doing this right now?"

Ask this question on behalf of employees, too. Don't give them something to do just so that they'll have something to do. That's how adults treat children—and it's a quick way to

send a strong message about how you really view your employees.

Yes, the word “business” means the state of being busy—but there’s no profit in simply keeping busy. Take the time to create meaningful work plans, as you coach employees toward being independent self-starters who solve problems without you.

### **TBM**

TBM stands for Total Bull Movement, and it’s sweeping the nation. Don’t get caught up in it.

Resist movements, slogans, acronyms, management models, and other “revolutionary” approaches that require hours of organization and training, many dollars of consultant time, a new file for the records, and a new employee to enter all the data for those records.

Instead, treat these movements and models as perspectives that can help you better understand how to improve your management style, rather than as ideologies that will only narrow your thinking. The wise manager is one who is slow to embrace or to reject a new approach, but eager to learn from it.

### **The Principle of Questions: Ask Lots of Them**

No such thing as a dumb question? Nonsense. You can ask lots of dumb questions, dumb in the sense that you really should have known the answer. Perhaps you did know it at one time and just forgot.

What’s the worst thing that could happen if you ask a dumb question? You’ll reveal your ignorance, which may be a little embarrassing, an occasional price to pay for not being perfect. Now, what’s the worst thing that could happen if you fail to ask questions? You remain ignorant.

The answers to a lot of questions may seem obvious, but they often help us gain insight and initiate creative breakthroughs.

## **The Principle of Mistakes: Everyone Makes Them**

Admit them. Fix them. Learn from them. Move on.

The folks who work with you know you're human. They'll have a lot more confidence in you when you show them that you know it, too.

If the notion of making a mistake still bothers you, call it something else. Call it learning.

The story of Thomas Alva Edison and the light bulb is worth retelling in this context. Edison tried hundreds of materials, trying to find a filament that would heat up when an electric current passed through it, giving off light without burning up. After hundreds of disappointments, there was still no guarantee that the idea would ever work.

When asked how he was able to endure so many failures, Edison reportedly said that he hadn't considered any of his attempts to be failures. He was simply learning what wouldn't work.

Mistakes teach us what doesn't work. That's very valuable information.

When you fall short of your goal, learn and go on. Redefine your goal, alter your approach, and get help. As long as you continue to try, you can never fail.

## **The Principle of Anger: Feel It—Don't Act on It**

A worker screws up and you lash out, administering a vicious, public reprimand.

It's only natural. You're righteously mad. All your hard work is wasted in a stupid, careless second. The worker had it coming.

Besides, if you try to bottle up all that anger, you're courting a heart attack or a stroke. Let it all out. Vent that spleen. It's better for you, right?

Feeling anger—along with frustration and disappointment—is natural. But you don't have to let the feeling control your actions. Ride out the adrenaline rush with a few deep breaths and some calm self-talk. If you can't handle the situa-

tion yet, walk away until you can. Then do the right thing, instead of the natural thing.

Anger, if not restrained, is frequently more harmful than the wrong that provoked it. That sentence is as true now as it was when Seneca spoke it two thousand years ago. You can't undo a mistake. But if you let it make you act in anger, you're probably just going to make the situation worse.

### **The Principle of Objectivity: There's No Such Thing**

Managers are supposed to be objective, to view the situation without emotion, to judge dispassionately, to rule infallibly.

Don't believe it!

You don't check your humanity at the door when you show up for work in the morning. You bring all of you to the task—your knowledge and experience, your empathy and understanding, your ambition and disappointment, your opinions and prejudices.

You're going to like some workers more than others.

You'll find some a lot easier to talk with. You'll appreciate those who seem most cooperative, most in tune with your philosophy and your ways of doing things, while resenting those who seem to fight you every step of the way.

In short, you'll respond to people as a person. And that means you'll be subjective.

Don't hide your biases from yourself. Own up to them and then compensate for these "natural" feelings to be sure you're being fair to all employees—whether you particularly like them or not.

### **The Principle of Generalization: Be Specific**

Have you ever endured a long explanation from a boss, only to leave even more confused about what you're supposed to do next?

Learn from that experience. When you explain the new project, remember that the fundamental question every employee wants and needs answered is simply this: "What am

I supposed to do?”

Here’s a simple test to ensure you answer it. Make sure the instruction has a verb in it. The verb “to be” in any of its forms doesn’t count. Include an action verb in your explanation.

### **The Principle of Small Stuff: Don’t Sweat It**

Conventional wisdom has this one half right.

You don’t have enough physical, emotional, and psychic energy to squander on the dozens of daily crises that nip at you in the workplace. Keep your perspective, your priorities, and your balance.

Your decisions really do matter—for your organization, the people who work with you, and your own sense of integrity and worth. You’ll face lots of big challenges that deserve all the sweat, all the concern and thought and effort you can give them. Just make sure you’ve got enough in reserve when these challenges come.

### **The Principle of Fear: Face It**

Stop running, the Chinese proverb advises, and face the monster that is chasing you. When you do, you often find that the monster isn’t so monstrous after all.

Fear needn’t cripple you. Courage is, after all, acting in the face of your fear, not in the absence of any fear. But trying to avoid the confrontation that frightens you just makes you incapable of right action. If you don’t face your fears, you allow them greater power over you.

Don’t fear the fear. It can’t hurt you. In fact, when you’re able to focus it, fear can keep you alert and give you energy.

Feel your fear. Then do the right thing anyway.

### **The Principle of Role Modeling: Coach by Example**

The workplace needs clear lines of authority, well-defined responsibility, and accountability for actions done and not done.

You want respect from your workers. Respect them.

You want them to listen to you. Listen to them.

You want them to withhold criticism when brainstorming for solutions to problems. Then stifle yours.

You've got to walk your talk, coach. Treat them exactly as you would have them treat you. That rule truly is golden, and it's the smartest advice on human relations you can ever give or get.

### **The Principle of Life: You Need One**

You are not your job. Your ultimate worth is not in your work. You don't have to earn the right to exist.

Devote time and energy to your life outside of work. It will make you a better worker. But even if it doesn't, it will give you a sense of satisfaction, contentment, and joy.

Nobody ever said, "I wish I'd spent more time at the office."

What if you died tomorrow? What would you most regret never having done?

OK. Now go do it!

Now you know everything you need to know to be an effective coach. For that matter, you probably knew virtually all of it when you started reading this book. You may have never seen it all put down in one place before, and you may have needed to have your own good instincts confirmed in print.

But coaching isn't just about knowing. It's about doing. *Coach* now stops being a noun, a name for your relationship with your workers, and becomes a verb, the way you interact with those workers every day.

### **The Coach's Checklist for Chapter 15**

- Go back and review the points in this chapter. They'll work for you on the job and, yes, in your life off the job as well.