

Coachability

By Joe Chiarella (www.JoeChiarella.com) on 28-Oct-2020
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Earlier this week I was on the phone with a colleague in Charlotte ([Andy Agrawal](#)) in the Merger and Acquisitions (M&A) industry ([DecisionPoint](#)) talking about a number of business opportunities. We were also discussing the nature of how Venture Capital, Private Equity and M&A firms help portfolio companies - and all businesses in general. How could we best help company owners be more successful? This was the question on our minds. That is something he and I both have been practicing as both science and art for a couple decades.

The truth is, business is complicated. There is no single silver bullet here - but I believe Coachability is important. Business is way harder than anyone who has never tried it can imagine it to be. Even when you've done it time and time again, it's still hard. I have done it directly about half a dozen times, and I have been at the table helping founders/owners of so many companies that I've lost count.

Business is a lot about timing; everyone says it. And it's true. But if you don't know the right thing to do - when the right time comes - and then actually do it - well - in a nutshell - if you do that often enough - you're out of business. Listen and Learn is about learning WHAT to do, by WHO, and WHEN to do it (and yes, sometimes HOW). Apply and Execute is about being aware enough to know the WHEN is NOW and then DOING the WHAT/HOW that leads to success.

As a consultant, advisor and coach, I do a lot of "abstractualization." I take concrete realities and abstract them into models to help people understand, at a deeper level, what is happening in their business, their product(s), their market(s) and even in themselves. Here is one of those models in a tight little graphic. Note: both axes are more continuums than they are binary. For purposes of clarity, the chart is simplified to these four quadrants. Note that "will" and "won't" are about attitude, not skill.

Let's start with the **Achievers**. This will not be a surprise to anyone. These leaders will listen and learn, but also apply and execute. *Achievers know the right thing to do, at the right time and in the right way - and then they do it.* Everyone I have ever coached or advised insists that they fall into this category. They insist they have the right attitude. I assure you, not everyone does.

The opposite, the **Resisters**, won't listen and learn, apply and execute. I don't believe I have ever met one; I believe everyone is willing to do at least one of these things. However, I must allow for their possibility.

Gerbils (I know! I know! But it's an apt visual!) tend to be massive doers. They are action oriented; do, do, do. When in trouble - "Do something (anything)!" is their mantra. They often listen, but when the crunch comes - they resort to action (reaction to be more precise) that follows old patterns. They won't learn. Imagine the gerbil wheel and you get the picture.

Joe's Coachability Matrix



Students listen intently. They take copious notes. Then when the crunch comes, they won't DO. They cannot help themselves. They know WHAT to do in the abstract sense – but the WHEN part seems to escape them or just the DOING part, or both.

In my personal experience, there are about a third in each of Gerbils, Students and Achievers. Real-world thus says, only one in three are Achievers; and that is probably being generous.

Gerbils and Students are wonderful human beings and, surprisingly often, successful (if you define that as a sustainable business) despite themselves. But their success, their achievements, could be so much more. The question is, if you genuinely conclude that you are more Gerbil or Student than Achiever, ask yourself “What would it take for me to become an Achiever?” If you can honestly say you won't Listen & Learn or you won't Apply and Execute, that is half the battle. It means you have “Learned.” The next step is Executing. Either way, having someone hold you accountable for that shift is the other half of the battle. That could be a coach, a spouse, a business partner, or a trusted mentor or friend.

Famed best-selling author, speaker, coach and business consultant, Patrick Lencioni of The Table Group ([Website](#)) and ([Linkedin](#)) often speaks of how important it is for leaders to “develop vulnerability based trust” wherein they acknowledge and augment their weaknesses. I agree, emphatically, with this assertion. How can we change and improve if we don't first accept that we have things within us that can benefit from improvement?

Another famed best-selling author, speaker, coach and business consultant, Matthew Kelly of Floyd Consulting ([Website](#)) and ([Linkedin](#)), also speaks of how becoming the-best-version-of-yourself (and your business) flows from being Committed, **Coachable** and Aware.

While coaching is part of what I do, it is not the main thrust of it. As a consultant and advisor, my clients and I work together on engagements designed to achieve specific goals.

If you decide a dedicated coach might work for you, consider a Peer CEO organization like Vistage Worldwide ([Website](#)) and ([Linkedin](#)) which includes coaching - though there are other such organizations as well. In my local area, I can highly recommend three Vistage Chairs (the Peer Group Leader) to you (alphabetical order): [John Dame](#), [Chad Harvey](#), or [Claudia Williams](#). They are all excellent, but different. Find your fit by speaking with them. Peer groups aren't for everyone. For more of a one-on-one coaching experience focused on maximizing strengths and realizing potential, consider [Pete Cafarchio](#) who is also an expert in the Gallup Strengths Finder.

One final thought before concluding: you don't have to be all things to all people! 😊 Sometimes recognizing that "apply and execute" is either not in your wheelhouse - or interest - then as long as you are willing to share the power and responsibility - find a partner who is jazzed by that.

In conclusion, start with a careful and honest self-examination of "Am I coachable?" and, if so, which quadrant am I in? Better yet, ask a partner or (gasp!) a subordinate. If you are, great, reach out to one of the above folks and get rolling! If you aren't, ask yourself what it would take to become so - and find someone willing to hold you accountable for that transition. Doing so will make you a better business owner, and a better person.