

**GURU  
GUIDE**  
with  
Vidusha and Anton

in conversation with  
**Joe McDonald**

29

**MAKING THE MOST  
OUT OF COACHING**



# A QUICK INTRODUCTION TO THE GURU GUIDE

The 'Guru Guide' is an attempt to refine decades of hard-earned expertise into succinct, simple and practical advice.

It is NOT meant to be an exhaustive exploration of a topic: rather, pointed areas of focus which can only be discerned by a practitioner. It is not meant to be a generic set of advice: it is advice from battle-hardened professionals who have had a lifetime of experience and proven track records.

## The Guru Guide has a pre determined format:

- ✓ It aims to understand a topic/ area of focus
- ✓ It aims to give tools to help you navigate the area
- ✓ It also gives contexts and examples: so that you can customize it to suit YOU

Exploratory, intimate and insightful, the Guru Guide aims to bring to you a wealth of expertise which can only be possible through veterans whose varied and in-depth experiences offer unparalleled insights.

The brevity and simplicity is by choice, and design. Focused on Executives and Managers who want to get quick tips and techniques, who are eager to improve their craft

and trade : the Guru Guide aims to offer 'little nuggets' of advice and importantly, simple tools, which will enable practitioners to up their game and benefit from expertise which may be hard to find in a hurry.

## INTRODUCING

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**VIDUSHA  
NATHAVITHARANA**

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Luminary Learning and the organization's founder. His areas of expertise are with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



**ANTON  
THAYALAN**

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands-on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management, and currently works as the Chief Evangelist of Luminary Learning and the Transformation Therapist of High5 Consultancy. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional clients.

## INTRODUCING JOE MCDONALD



I (V) met Joe during my first Masters, over our mandatory residential semester in York. It was an online Masters in Leading Innovation and Change; we had over 20 countries making up our 'batch', and it was a joy to meet some of them during the residential workshop. Joe stood out not only because of his obvious height, but because there was a certain charisma about him. The level of intelligence and insight he had was obvious in the manner he analysed case studies and got involved in the activities. He was also one of those people who made friends with ease and by the end of the residency, I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that everyone knew Joe

It is not a surprise therefore, to see Joe as a professional Coach. His ability to connect, listen, empathise, distill what's being said, ask pointed questions and probe deep makes him absolutely perfect for the coaching role as his skill set goes hand in glove with his chosen vocation.

So, I thought, who better to talk about how to make the most out of coaching than Joe?

## WHY TAKE ON A COACH IN THE FIRST PLACE ?



There is a point in anyone's life or career where one feels a little 'stuck'. You are doing nothing wrong, neither are you really getting the results you want! You feel stagnant, underutilised and you feel you can do more, but you just don't know how! This is where a Personal Coach comes in.

Coaching, sadly, is becoming a bit of a fad these days which is probably why you are asking this question to start with. However, it is important to understand that though coaching for personal life and a business setting is relatively new, coaching in sports has been there since time immemorial. The same role was played in education when you did your Masters or PhD, where you were generally assigned a Senior Lecturer or a Professor to guide you through your thesis.

The fundamental issue is this: we can never grow to our fullest potential completely by ourselves - we all need someone to help us through it at different stages of our lives and careers. Whether the person coaching you is titled coach or not, the role actually gets played, starting with our parents in early childhood to teachers, friends, bosses and sometimes, complete strangers.

So, if you are aware that you need help, then that is where the role of a Coach comes into play.

# DOES COACHING ACTUALLY HELP ?

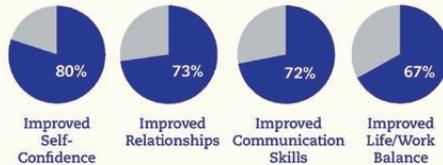
## 1. Increased Productivity

Professional coaching explicitly targets maximizing potential and in doing this unlocks latent sources of productivity. At the heart of coaching is a creative and thought-provoking process that supports individuals to confidently pursue new ideas and alternative solutions with greater resilience in the face of growing complexity.



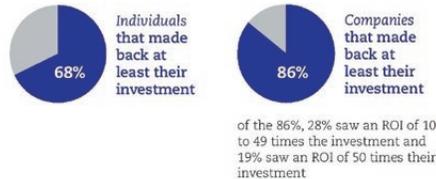
## 2. Positive People

In the face of uncertainty caused by workforce reductions and other factors, expectations of the remaining workforce in a suffering company are very high. Restoring self-confidence to face the challenges is critical to meet organizational demands.



## 3. Return on Investment

The coach-client relationship generates learning and clarity for forward action with a commitment to clear measurable outcomes. Coaching offers a good return on investment for individual clients and offers a significant return on investment for companies.



## 4. Satisfied Clients

Virtually all companies or individuals who hire a coach are satisfied. If your company is not thriving, coaching is an effective catalyst for change.



Source: 2009 ICF Global Coaching Client Study



coachfederation.org

That's a loaded question : given that I am a Coach too !

But, in all honesty, Coaching works only in certain circumstances : the obvious one being that the Coach you select needs to be competent for the task chosen. YOUR attitude and learning agility also comes into the equation here : as much as many other contributing factors.

There have been many studies done on the effectiveness of coaching : and the results have been quite outstanding...

So, done right, Coaching certainly works !

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRAINING AND COACHING ?



I try to look at training and coaching as complementary tools rather than opposing ones. There are development elements best done via training, and there are other development interventions best done via coaching.

This is like asking me what is better - a sports car or a 4 wheel drive? It depends on what you want to do isn't it? Both are fine as they are, but if you use them for the wrong purposes, then I guess you will get the wrong results!

Coaching is one on one - I guess that's a critical difference. It is also by default, a process. There is no one session type coaching: coaching is always a process and is generally 3-6 months in duration. Training can be a one-off session, though we all agree it is never effective that way.

Training and Coaching are both required to develop people.



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## **PRINCIPLE 1 : IT STARTS WITH YOU WANTING MORE FROM YOURSELF !**



Before you take on any form of coaching, you must want more for yourself. You must be willing to learn, and do what it takes to build a better you. This is possibly why organisations shouldn't simply tell people to go for coaching; rather it must be a request that originates from the person's innate wanting to grow and develop themselves.

Coaching just doesn't work when people are sent for it; it's the same as participants sent for training, but a little worse because coaching is one on one. As they always say "You can take a horse to water, but you can't make it drink - the same is true for any self-development initiative. Coaching is more than anything else, coming to grips with your own limitations, being open to the suggestion that things can be viewed in multiple ways and above all, working on yourself in order to be the best version of YOU. How can any of this be done if you are not self-aware and don't understand your own areas for improvement?

## **TOOL 1 : HOW TO HOME IN ON WHAT YOU NEED TO IMPROVE**

Do you want to really find out what you want to improve in? Well, try these tools:

### **360**

360 REVIEW ON YOU BASED ON THE COMPANY'S COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK. THIS IS GENERALLY DONE AT MANAGEMENT LEVELS IN MOST ORGANISATIONS. A 360 REVIEW GETS FEEDBACK FROM YOURSELF, YOUR SUPERIORS, PEERS AND SUBORDINATES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS AND GIVE YOU A HOLISTIC VIEW OF HOW YOU ARE PERCEIVED INSIDE THE ORGANISATION: A GREAT PLACE TO START YOUR COACHING INTERVENTION.

### **Personal SWOT**

IF YOU WANT TO HIRE A COACH IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY WHY NOT DO A PERSONAL SWOT FIRST? UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AND ALSO, THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS YOU SEE FOR YOURSELF AND THEN ASK YOURSELF WHAT YOU NEED TO IMPROVE ON OR FURTHER STRENGTHEN BASED ON THE OPPORTUNITY YOU WANT TO EXPLOIT OR THE THREAT YOU NEED TO AVOID.

### **Personal observation**

YOU CAN ALSO MERELY OBSERVE YOURSELF AND ASK YOURSELF WHAT YOU THINK IT IS YOU NEED TO CORRECT IN ORDER FOR YOU TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO INTROSPECT DEEPLY THOUGH, RATHER THAN MERELY LOOK AT AN AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT.

## PRINCIPLE 2 : YOU NEED TO CHOOSE THE 'RIGHT' COACH



Finding the right coach is important.

All coaches (at least those who have their basic credentials in place) ought to have their basics in place and will do a decent job. However, the coach that is right for you may not be just any coach.

Spend some time in making sure you find the right coach because if you don't, the coaching experience may not be an enriching one. Generally, when you find the right coach, it becomes a life-long partnership and generally endures after the coaching assignment is done. The right coach becomes your friend just as much as your coach.

Remember, there is nothing called the right coach, but there is something called the right coach for you!

## TOOL 2 : HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT COACH

Remember to look out for these as fundamentals :

- A) Has the Coach worked in a similar setting to you?
- B) Does the Coach possess relevant experience?
- C) Is the coach recommended - specially by someone you hold in esteem ?
- D) It is best if the Coach is certified too

### Personality is complimentary



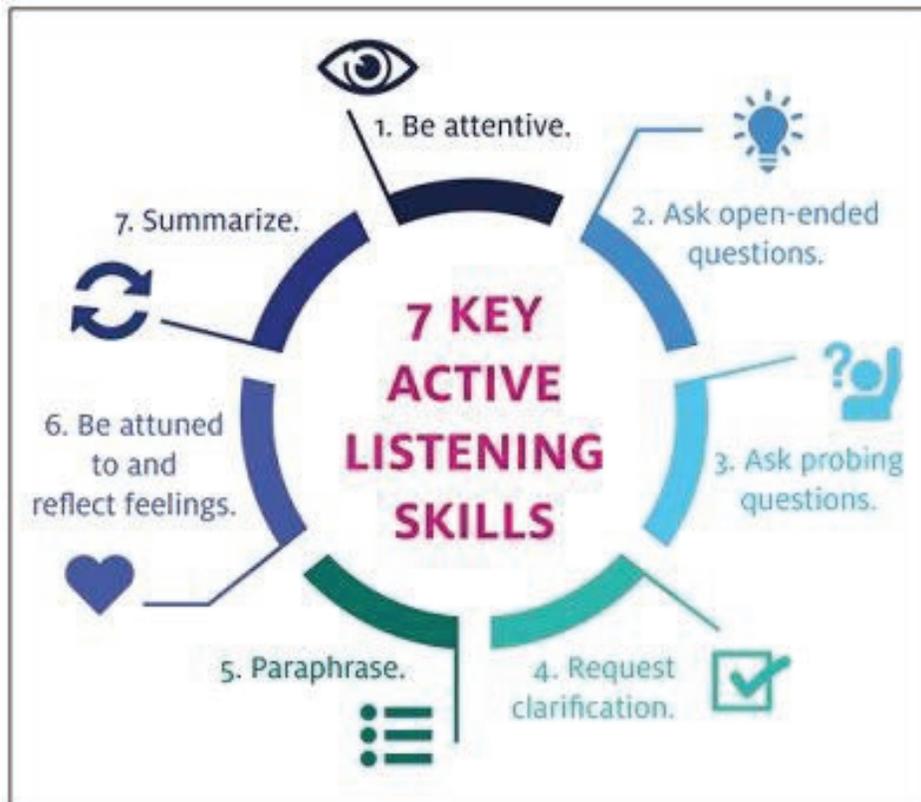
## **PRINCIPLE 3 : WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN AND TRY AND THINGS OUT**



Taking on coaching and thinking of yourself superior to your coach is a counterproductive thing. You don't have to agree, but you need to be able to listen. A good coach does not offer solutions anyway; he/she will merely facilitate a conversation allowing you to make your own choices along the way. However, in certain contexts, your coach may well give you some insights and new ways of approaching the problem/situation. So be willing to listen and actually try things out before you dismiss it.

Remember, coaching is a partnership, not a transaction and it is rooted in mutual respect and confidence. If you are not willing to listen and think you have all the answers, then why seek a coach in the first place?

## TOOL 3 : HOW TO LISTEN TO LEARN



Source : [www.buffer.com](http://www.buffer.com)

Remember that you need to be able to 'understand' what your coach is telling you : and for this active listening is essential. Unless you actually communicate effectively : there might well be subtle nuances and subtleties that you missed : which will affect the whole outcome.

So, learn to listen - actively...

## SOME FINAL TIPS AND ADVICE

### So, what is a Coaching approach to management?

Today, employees look for managers that empower and enable them to generate their own solutions. Someone who is genuinely interested in wanting to see them develop and grow. Coaching approaches empower more staff to take responsibility for decision-making as they feel more valued and take greater ownership over their workload.

For the manager themselves, there are also significant benefits including improved staff morale, less sick leave taken and reduced staff turnover. Better relationships and greater efficiencies allow them to work to improve the system, as opposed to being stuck in it all of the time. Here is a brief outline of what it involves:

#### » ASKING POWERFUL QUESTIONS!

Managers that adopt a coaching approach typically ask more questions and suspend the traditional temptation to jump in automatically with solutions (which are often a bad idea!). They demonstrate curiosity, encouraging employees to challenge themselves and generate more effective solutions as a result.

#### » USING YOUR INTUITION

Effective coaching requires the ability to use intuition and this is something that managers can learn with training and practice. Employees' words communicate to us what's going on, but only in part. Gestures, body language, tone of voice and energy levels, for example, convey important messages which also shouldn't be ignored.

#### » BETTER UNDERSTANDING & CLARITY

Because managers that adopt a coaching approach ask more effective powerful questions and listen intuitively to employees, they automatically gain a better understanding of the real issues that individuals and teams face on a day-to-day basis. This then allows those managers to develop more effective strategies, systems and synergies to improve medium to long-term performance.

#### » FEEDBACK & OBSERVATIONS

Managers that adopt a coaching approach provide more effective feedback and observations. They may of course provide an employee with a potential solution however often not before asking the individual if they would like to hear it. They also challenge employees to build upon the potential solution that has been offered in order to make it even more effective.

## »» CREATING A COACHING CULTURE

Managers that use the coaching approach not only positively change the performance of themselves, individual employees and teams, but also positively influence the overall organisational culture to one of individual and collective self-discovery and motivation.

### **PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT or so they say but only if you're practicing in the right way**

In order to learn how to perform under real pressure, regular practice that is undertaken should simulate the stressors that will exist when the team is faced with actual reality. Despite this quite obvious fact, all too often teams receive training that is far removed from reality. Here are three ways in which to change your own practice for the better:

- »» **INCREASED PRESSURE ON TASK** – Effectively what we are doing in this instance is making the task that we are practicing more difficult so that when the team is placed in a real-life situation, they are able to meet the challenge. In a sporting sense, this may involve making the playing field smaller so that teams learn to work in tight spaces. In a business context, it may involve asking teams to practice solving problems with less resources or less time than they would typically have.
- »» **INCREASED PRESSURE ON TEAM MEMBERS** – Here we focus on applying increased stressors on the individual team members themselves and the group as a whole in order to monitor how it affects performance. Again, in a sporting context, this might involve asking team members to complete a skill-based drill or a cognitively demanding task immediately after a difficult cardio routine has finished to see how they cope when physically fatigued. In a business sense, it may involve increasing the cognitive load by saturating the team with large amounts of complex information before asking them to solve a problem.
- »» **INCREASED PRESSURE THROUGH OBSERVATION & CONSEQUENCES** – Most of us can perform quite well when we are left to our own devices, but increasing the pressure on the team by explicitly stating that their performance is being observed - and will result in rewards or forfeits - focuses minds while again increasing pressure.

Utilising some of these approaches can be truly effective in enabling teams to perform better when under pressure, but only if there is a learning component involved. Teams should be encouraged to reflect on how they experienced the exercises above. What went well? Where were the challenges? If they were placed in a similar situation again, what might they do differently? How can we replicate those positive outcomes when it comes to a real performance on any given day?

## **Everyone would like a vibrant life truly filled with meaning and purpose.**

But can you honestly say “Yes, this is me”? Or perhaps, you find life slipping by underpinned by a deep sense of frustration about how things are turning out. If so, then try this simple exercise as you take those first steps to making positive changes.

- 01) Think about what has energized you over the last twelve months? Has anything inspired you or motivated you more than usual? If so, write it down.
- 02) Think about what has drained you over the last twelve months? What has left you frustrated and anxious? If you can identify anything, again write it down.

Remember, that we do not learn from experience but rather, we learn from reflecting on our experiences. For that reason, the questions above are so important to us.

- 01) Next, try to define what success actually means to you. What really matters to you and provides your life with meaning? Write it down in as much detail as you can.
- 02) Now, take that picture of success and break it down into smaller actionable goals. A good place to start is by asking yourself “What is the smallest thing that I could do right now to move me towards my picture of success”?
- 03) Finally, once you have written down your plan, you need to commit to action and share it with those around you. The intention here is that they will both offer support and hold you to account.

Nobody has more control over your life than you. There is nobody coming with a life jacket to save you. Living a life filled with meaning and purpose is within the capability of everyone and yes, that includes you!

# JOE MCDONALD

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*create10 Founder, Joe McDonald is a professional coach and trainer. He is passionate about developing the capability of individuals, teams and organisations with an emphasis is upon empowering individuals to develop self-leadership skills. With a proven track record in supporting and enabling clients to achieve greater clarity of purpose, improved goal attainment and enhanced levels of motivation he treats each individual client and business with an individualised focus and high level of discretion.*

*Joe provides one to one professional coaching in person, by phone or online. Also, impactful team workshops (in person & online) as well as providing flexible online courses. He works with global pharma, IT and finance organisations for example as well as SMEs and Start-Ups. So too, does he support individual professionals simply motivated to improve their professional and personal lives.*



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