

# Call & Response



align  profit

“The physical world, including our bodies, is a response of the observer. We create our bodies as we create the experience of our world..” –Deepak Chopra



## Your Leadership Influence



Effective leadership relies more than ever on influencing people—up, down, and around you. It requires a leader to become proficient at encouraging diverse opinion, channeling a variety of ideas, and eventually gaining buy-in to coordinated action and results in alignment with individual and organizational goals.

The Leader-as-Coach approach directs all your leadership skills and creative energy at winning high commitment and enabling high performance. As Coach, your challenge is to influence your team members, your peers, and even your boss in this direction.

### Habit vs. Intention

Think for a moment about the methods you use to influence the people around you. Do you unconsciously default to a style that comes naturally to you, or do you consciously adapt your methods based on what will work best for each individual and situation?

In countless leadership training sessions, I watch participants gravitate toward their unconscious, habitual styles rather than consciously adapt their approach to the situation and to the people they want to influence.

And often when they do not see the results they expect, a few actually intensify their default behavior, despite the obvious fact that it's not working! That is madness, I say! But since we all slip into this kind of behavior at times, let's look at a remedy.



## From Africa with Style



What do you do when you set out to coach and influence performance? What style do you prefer? What are your primary and secondary means of leading change among those you coach? Let me suggest a Coaching technique you can adapt, consciously, to any coaching challenge.

### Out of Africa

In our CoachQuest Workshops, I import a coaching approach from sub-Saharan Africa called Call and Response. In this pervasive form of democratic participation, African performers actively involve their audiences in their performances. Transcending the separation of audience and performers so common in the West, their performances are participatory in nature and not meant to be watched passively.

In human communication, Call and Response refers to the spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener. I would venture to say that even management guru Peter Drucker talks about the power of Call and Response when he observes, "People tend to support that which they help to create."

There's a good chance that Call and Response has been part of your life. For example, if I say, "See you later, alligator," what's your response? "After while, crocodile," of course! If I sing, "Hit the road, Jack" your response is, "And don't you come back no more..."



## Coaching with Collaborative Participation



In your role as coaching leader, wouldn't it be nice to Call for what you want and then get the Response you want from your team? Call and Response coaching can inspire that kind of collaborative participation, help you find ways forward, and achieve results that advance engagement and performance. It can help create an organization of High Commitment and High Performance, or as I like to say, "Gaining the hands, head, and heart" of performance.

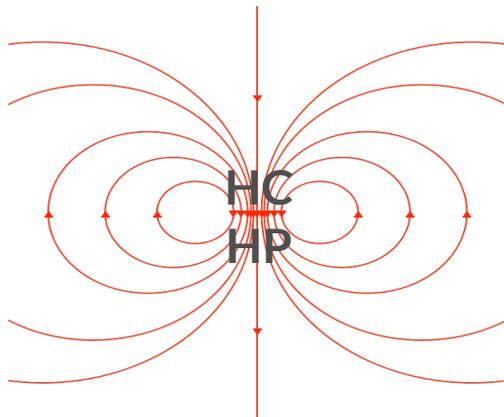
Traditional leadership and coaching, even today, focus almost exclusively on debating forcefully to influence others, presenting views, arguing strongly, and spouting off demands. Instead, we should embrace the idea that organizations might be more like living systems that learn and grow in a more cooperative, give-and-take manner.

Peter Senge and others have encouraged the power of inquiry and involvement as an alternative to advocating views and demands, cross examining people, or finding fault.

Similarly, Call and Response Coaching prescribes that coach and employee discuss, define, reflect upon, and eventually transform behavior in a way that ultimately makes a transformational difference in the success of the organization.



## The Magnetic Force of Call and Response



On the left you see a diagram of a magnetic field. A magnet uses fields of force to attract things to it. Imagine heartfelt High Commitment (HC) and visible High Performance (HP) at the center of the diagram. Call and Response coaching draws people toward that center, whether they have yet to reach it or have been there and have strayed away.

Think of a time when you felt “magnetically” connected to your manager, your colleagues, or your community—connected with a force so strong that it felt as though it could not be broken. What was that experience? What did it feel like?

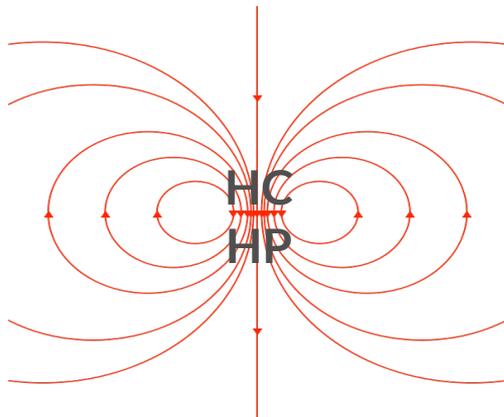
### How to Attract Commitment

In every Coaching Call—whether as a statement or a question—seek to uncover information about why your employee holds a particular view and ask questions about his or her underlying assumptions and beliefs. Explore with your employee his or her reasons, attitudes, and beliefs in order to understand behavior. Continue to Call until you receive your intended Response.

As you Call, toggle between the poles of statements and questions. Think of yourself as working like a magnet to draw your employee toward ownership, accountability, and empowerment.



## Two poles of Call and Response



Call and Response Coaching can influence and empower higher commitment and enable higher performance in two ways—as Reinforcement and as Redirection.

### Reinforcement

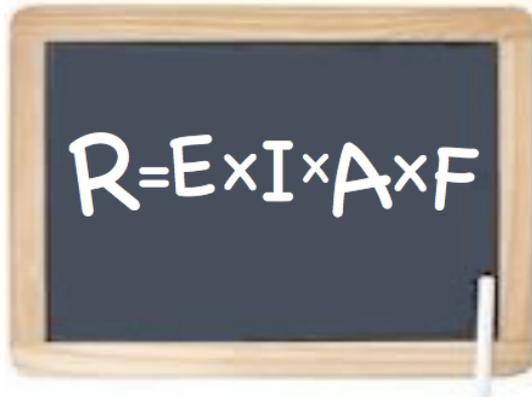
In the Reinforcement Call, you encourage and reward your team on what they are doing well, so that, in Response, they not only keep doing it, but learn to accept and own the positive behavior.

### Redirection

In the Redirection Call, you help your employees discover what they can do differently or need to change in order to improve their performance. In Response, they redirect their behavior from negative to positive.



## The Expectation Formula



If you paid attention during math class, it's easy to read this formula:  $R = E \times I \times A \times F$ . It says your coaching Results (R) will be multiplied by the quality of the Expectations (E) you set times the level of Involvement (I) you encourage times the amount of solution Adoption (A) you achieve times the Follow-through (F) you accomplish.

### What is Quality Expectation Setting?

In short, it's simply setting a clear direction for what you want. Doing so requires that you outline performance expectations in a way that spells out what your employees should do and how they should perform their jobs.

Managers are responsible for identifying the key behaviors they expect and for defining the characteristics of those behaviors. Expectations should be clear, succinct, time-bound, and clearly associated with specific tasks and job functions.

### How does Quality Involvement influence Adoption?

When you involve others (prompt a Response) in generating solutions, those you wish to influence will become much more likely to take enthusiastic accountability for the solutions **they** generate, which means they will eagerly take responsibility for Adopting the solutions they helped create.

Let's now focus on using Call and Response to refine your Expectations.



## Thorough Examination

Use the Call and Response approach to thoroughly examine your employee's intentions as well as your case for your Expectations. Together in a spirit of sincere curiosity, look for flaws, evaluate benefits, and question motives. Examine your joint plans the way you expect your doctor to examine you.

When your doctor questions you, she's looking for problems. She doesn't want you to be sick, but she wants to know what's wrong, if something is wrong.

Just as a person whose job it is to keep you healthy looks for ways to show that you are not, you want to examine solutions to ferret out their weaknesses and flaws. Since few plans are perfect, honest questions will anticipate problems. That's good! Because it's so much better to find ways to remove any interferences before any plan is set in motion.

Probe especially hard at any lingering doubts employees may have about their plans. Question your team as you would your doctor, plumber, or investment counselor about any issues that may keep them from implementation. This type of deep questioning drives both adoption and accountability.



## The Eternal Balancing Act



When you work the Call and Response process, its effectiveness will rise to the degree that you balance both sides of the scale—Call and Response. Whether it's a spontaneous and casual conversation, email exchange, or text message, apply Call and Response as you would in a scheduled coaching session or team meeting.

### Nothing but Call

Leaders often make the mistake of relying too much on expressing their Expectations to get their message across. Time pressure often drives the question, "Isn't it easier to just tell people what to do?" Of course, it's easier to provide answers and to push your views so strongly that you leave too little room for discussion, debate, and involvement. But if all you do is express your Expectations, present your ideas, and dictate your instructions, you will reduce commitment and eventually lower performance.

### Nothing but Response

If you do nothing but listen to your team and merely accept their ideas without explicitly stating what success will look like and what outcomes you expect, you will leave your team confused and frustrated. Your team looks to you for direction. Let's not forget that you need to Respond to that Call.



## Call and Response in Disguise



I'm not a lawyer, but I've watched them on TV. As you know, a good attorney can lead hapless witnesses and cause them to say what they don't mean. A manipulative debater can make opponents come off as advocating the opposite of what they believe. Likewise, crafty Coaches can manipulate their teams to do their bidding rather than draw commitment from them.

Since it's only human to want to have your way, you have to be careful not to abuse your position merely to get your way. The temptation to do so can bring down the mightiest leader, even those with the best intentions.

It's actually better to go ahead and act like a dictator than to disguise tyrannical behavior as coaching. Your team will recognize false attempts at Leadership Coaching. False Call and Response will do more damage than outright heavy-handedness.

### Where Do You Stand?

In addition to the coaching you receive, you should check yourself and the signals you send when you make statements and ask questions. Your words and actions let your team know where you stand when it comes to your Expectations and their Involvement.

This paper has given you a taste of the theory behind Call and Response Coaching. To put this powerful process into practice in a team-based-learning setting, [register here](#) for our next [CoachQuest Leader-as-Coach Workshop](#).