

Leader, Lead Thyself

Will you like to develop better-performing leaders?

by Mobit Malik

“I think John Doerr would say Bill Campbell saved Google,” remarks Will Hearst, a partner at KPCB, the Silicon Valley VC firm.

Doerr, Hearst’s colleague with VC-superstar status, gushes “God bless that man. I don’t know where the company [Google] would be without him.”

Bill who? You have heard of Messrs Brin and Page. Eric Schmidt, the CEO, too. But Bill Campbell? What has he got to do with Google? Or saving it?

Campbell, former CEO and current chairman of Intuit, as well as an Apple board member, is one of the most respected executives in Silicon Valley. He also moonlights as an informal management adviser.

One of the companies where Campbell advised the senior management was Google. John Heilemann writes in GQ, “The most important thing that Campbell did was to spend a lot of time with Larry and Sergey, explaining the difference between being a cool company or a smart company and being a successful company.”

Campbell's contribution to Google didn't end with advising the founders. "He coached Eric on what it means to be a CEO—not the CEO of Novell but of a company like Google" says Hearst.

"It didn't happen overnight, but Bill Campbell won" adds Hearst. And this win helped Campbell contribute towards making Google into the powerhouse we see today.

Eric Schmidt, a highly experienced Silicon Valley executive, and equally successful, much before he got to Google, has nothing but praise for Campbell "At first we tried to integrate him just a little bit, but we eventually decided our only goal was to get as much of Bill's time as possible. Our basic strategy is to invite him to everything. He's priceless beyond belief."

But if the founders and the CEO of Google needed advice on leading successfully, does it mean coaching is only for startups? And, is it a fad?

According to Jim Bolt, whose firm recently conducted a survey on Executive development, there has been a dramatic increase in the use of coaching. In 2004, 56% of the companies said that executive coaching would be a major learning method they would emphasize. "In a 2006 follow-up

survey, 51% said the use of coaching had actually increased." Why?

Its Lonely at the top

In any position of responsibility, life, behind the glamour, is not easy. However good one's relationships with colleagues, it is not always easy to share dilemmas and thoughts with them. It helps if there is someone with whom one can discuss ideas, somebody who helps us work better with the day-to-day workplace issues.

A coach, being an outsider, is not burdened with organizational baggage. His only interest is the person he is working with. In fact, his success depends on the success of that person. He only wants to help the executive he is working with perform better. Which, perhaps, may not always be the case with an organizational insider.

The most important word about Bill Campbell goes to Mike Moritz, of Sequoia Capital, another VC investor in Google, "He is the quiet, behind-the-scenes, unsung hero in this whole epic." A coach's aim is glory for the executive he is working with, not for himself. In fact, had Campbell not stayed behind the scenes he wouldn't have done his job well. Tellingly, Campbell strongly urged Hailemann, "Don't overdramatize my role. I'm just another set of eyes, another person in the room."

Getting things done

Recently a friend introduced me to the concept of 'Gyan Papi'. A *Bangla* word, literally "Knowledge Sinner" ; it refers to the state where we have the knowledge and yet do not act in accordance with it.

Does this describe somebody you know?

I daresay, perhaps, there is a bit of a *gyan papi* in all of us? Often we know the best course of action; we know what we need to do, and yet we don't .

A coach performs this important role of being the one to help us clarify what we need to do, why; and importantly; helps us do it. By working with us in developing a plan and above all, helping us stick to that plan.

We have multiple issues competing for our attention, and at times, don't stick to our resolutions. A coach, on the other hand, helps us stay focused. David S. Pottruck co-CEO of Charles Schwab & Co., who has been working with an executive coach for a long period, candidly admits, "it's very hard to get better on your own."

Does Coaching work?

Another survey of 48 organizations in the US by Bolt's firm has uncovered that startling fact that 43% of CEOs and 71% of

the senior executive team had worked with a coach. And 63% of organizations surveyed say they plan to increase their use of coaching over the next five years.

But the real issue is; did the executives who underwent coaching find it useful? Well, *92% of leaders working with a coach say they plan to use one again.*

The last word goes to Scott Cook, CEO of Intuit (the \$1.7 billion company that created financial tools Quicken and Quickbooks) for almost 20 years. Cook acknowledges that he made some of his best decisions using a coach.

About being more productive and performing better, Cook asks a simple question, *"Don't you think there's a reason that even superhuman athletes, the best in the world, always have coaches?"*

Originally published in [Businessworld](#), in *Wide Angle*, the monthly guest column by Anoova Consulting's Leadership and Strategy Practice.

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About the Leadership and Strategy Practice Mohit says, "We have made every mistake we ask you to avoid and broken every piece of advice we give. Whatever we know about leadership and strategy has been learned the hard way".

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