

## The Best Coach I Ever Had

By Amy BC Tan

At some point in our life, some of us may have experienced a person who helped us to see our own strengths, who shaped our thinking and spurred us to move on. Often, this person does not even know how much impact he had on us. We probably never told him.

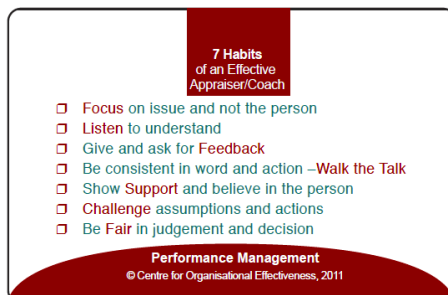
Many years ago, when I was new to the professional life with only my study and some months of exposure to the business world at AT&T under my belt, I met Doug. Then, being young in my training experience, my challenge was to deliver some modules of the newly developed culture building programme to the entire organisation over several runs of workshops. Doug was our master trainer who was supposed to help us getting started.

I clearly remember the first time I stood in-front of 50 participants delivering my topic. Before I took the stage, Doug was next to me, smiled at me and said “Go! You can make a difference. Just be yourself!” During my presentation, I could see him sitting at the back of the room, raising his two thumbs up to tell me that I was doing well. This little gesture was so different to what I encountered from many other wannabe coaches. I got the impression he was focussing 100% on supporting me – although he had many other trainees.

Doug cultivated the habit of a daily “check-in” dialogue. Every morning, he asked me to share what I wanted to do for the participants that will benefit them. He did not give me the answers. He rather guided by asking. He got me thinking and exploring myself. It was the same after the training, when Doug usually asked three questions at the “check-out” dialogue: What did I do well today? What did I learn today? What will I do differently tomorrow?

Once at the check-in dialogue, I shared that I would like to spend time in getting to know the participants better, to be able to support them. And, I suggested that trainers should immerse with the participants. Doug caught the word “immerse” and from then on, he would always use the word to remind the trainers – a little acknowledgement that went a long way to encourage me. Subsequently, I had no fear to bring up new ideas. Even more, I learned how important it can be to listen well. And, I learned that little gestures and timely credits can really motivate you and shape your behaviour – just as Doug did.

I still treasure two items I received from Doug. The first one is a bookmark he presented to me one day – after a job well done, as he said. He wrote “You have made a difference. Thank you!” The second gift is a book titled “Golden Nuggets” in which he wrote for me “You are a special spirit. Your love for people inspires me very much. Always remember how wonderful you truly are.” I was not really aware that I had the ability to inspire others. Doug spotted this skill in me and encouraged me to make use of it. With this awareness, I learned to focus on developing and enabling colleagues and team members.



So, what is it that made my coach so special to me? He cared about me. He taught me by observing, by listening patiently and giving immediate feedback – always in a constructive and positive way. Doug constantly reinforced my strengths instead of working on my weaknesses. Using discovery questions, he got me seeking for solutions. He developed the sense of being there when I needed him most. Doug took pride in making me winning.

These ingredients made him the best coach I ever had.

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