



## The Collins Bus

by Garold L. Markle

Jim Collins says that it's leadership's responsibility to "get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and everybody in the right seats." Interestingly, he doesn't say that it's HR's job. It's *management's* responsibility to make this happen.

My question to Mr. Collins is simple. How do you suggest we do that, Jim? My answer is equally simple: coaching. Not evaluating. Not grading. Coaching.

In sports, a coach is responsible for picking who is on her team, who plays what position, who is a starter, who is disciplined, and who is off the team. In professional sports, an owner gives a coach money and people with a mandate to get them to play together in a way that allows them to win. When they fail to win, owners typically want to know what changes are pending. When a coach fails to get her team to win and runs out of ideas for change, it is time for a new coach.

In business, we've come to use the term coaching to represent the advice and counsel given by a consultant hired to by a top executive. Since it is the executive being advised who normally makes the employment decision, however, this appears to be a poor use for the metaphor. A more accurate label for this value exchange might be executive counseling. It's not the same.



Coaching is more than giving advice and counsel. It's also more than completing a performance review - evaluating a direct report's individual performance against competencies derived from cultural values and a job description. Ability is important to both assess and discuss, but so are each individual's Interest and the organization's Need. A coach needs to soberly examine the intersection of these three critical variables if they expect to create a high performing team and ultimately a winning organization.

How many times have you encountered an individual in a job who simply lacks the desire to perform? Perhaps they had Interest at one point in time, but now it's gone. They could do a good job, they just no longer care to make the effort. The coaching challenge is to determine what happened to their Interest. Can it be rekindled or is it gone for good?

In some situations evolving Interest can still be accommodated within the same organization. It all depends on Need. If an individual has become bored with a work routine he's done a thousand times, perhaps you can change it up. Alternatively, perhaps you can find another Need that would be a good match for his Interest and Ability. If so, can you move him over, up or down? This is what Collins calls finding the right seats. If not, despite presence of both Ability and Need, it's off the bus he goes.

An organization with Need but lacking resources with Interest or Ability should be recruiting, either internally or externally. Take the CEO whose son was his obvious heir apparent. Despite having everything needed to do the job, including brainpower, formal education, work experience and a last name that rhymes with "owner", he was reluctant to step up and accept the full weight of responsibility of the top office. In short, he didn't want to replicate his father's workaholic lifestyle. When faced with the option of working for someone other than his father, however, the young man quickly decided to quit equivocating. He accepted the CEO role and took his chances on life balance.

Sports coaches have a roster to fill. They need a full bus with the best possible players ready and eager to give all they've got to succeed. The whole organization will rise or fall as a function of their decisions. Sounds a lot like business to me.

So, how do you best fill your bus?

- **Institutionalize Listening:** Make sure that you check employee Interest at least annually using a formal process for collecting and reviewing this information. Your most talented people will leave you quickly if they're either bored or ignored.
- **Think Systemically:** Introduce a system like [Catalytic Coaching](#) that provides the template for a comprehensive series of formal conversations about performance and potential. Utilize a process that is scalable to an employee count well beyond what your organization will ever approximate.
- **Educate:** Train managers to function effectively as coaches. Train employees to be coachable. Remember that coaching is a skill that improves with education, mentoring and practice.
- **Speed it Up:** Work performance problems expeditiously. Individuals who can't or won't perform should be dealt with in days, not weeks, months or years. Spend less time with poor performers, so you can have more time to invest in good ones.



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- **Gen 1:** Realize that each individual is unique. One of a kind. They are not a carbon copy of everyone else born in their decade: Gen X, Gen Y or Gen Next. Get to understand both their Interest and Abilities as a unique individual and tailor your coaching solution to fit only them.



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