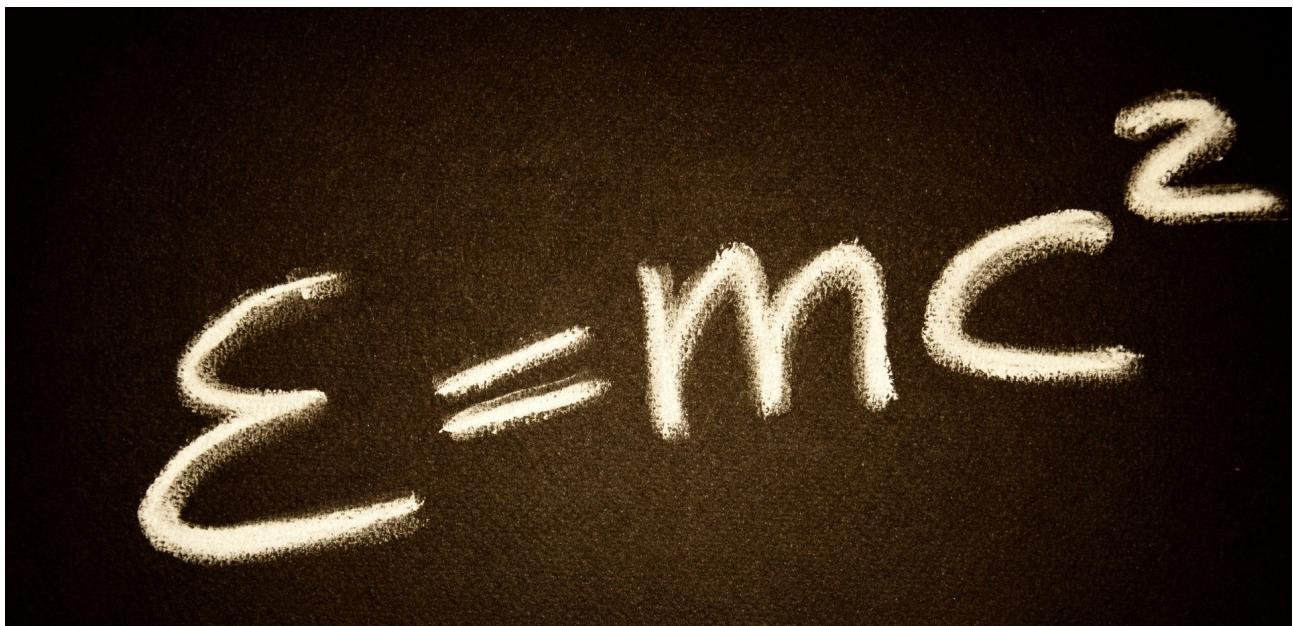


EINSTEIN ON TEAM COACHING



Albert Einstein once said, 'If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the answer, I would spend the first 55 minutes figuring out the proper questions to ask. For if I knew the questions, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes.'

Einstein's quote actually inspired a little three-step formula for coaching teams that I came up with some months back as I was preparing to facilitate an executive team in Singapore and a regional marketing group in Hong Kong. Seeing how effective it was at mobilizing people's energies towards a common task, motivated me to pen this post for all who desire to create more powerful team experiences.

While much has been said and written about Individual Coaching, less has been done for Team Coaching. This is quite ironic for the reality is, most of us work in groups and teams, and the all-too-often truth is, people face challenges working with, understanding and accepting one another. It's quite compelling to believe that the future of business coaching will have a significant place for Team Coaching.

Here's a definition of what Team Coaching is – ***Group facilitation at its best, where core coaching competencies combine with the best of experiential learning, to drive deep collaboration and strong actionable outcomes.***

And here's my Einstein-inspired Team Coaching Approach in three neat steps:

STEP #1 – 'Starbursting'

Most people are familiar with 'brainstorming' where team members generate ideas and solutions for a task or challenge at hand. While most know the steps, few actually do it right – which is really about staying open to the ideas that come up and avoiding judgment, something many of us find hard to do. Hence, brainstorming often degenerates into a competitive play where we promote our own ideas and patronize, or reject, the contributions of others.

Here, Einstein's quote reminded me of a lesser-known variant of brainstorming – Starbursting – which I chanced upon a while ago. While brainstorming churns out answers, Starbursting is about coming up with questions. Believe it or not, making this little adjustment radically reduces competition and increases collaboration, in an instant! ***When people focus on coming up with questions rather than answers, they become much better at sticking to generating ideas and not judging.*** My participants found this approach liberating as it takes the pressure off having to come up with the answers right away and having to maintain a constant 'one-up' position over others.

To coach using Starbursting, draw a six-point star on a flipchart or whiteboard and write the group's key task or challenge in the center of it. Label the six points of the star with the '5Ws+1H' – **Who, When, Where, Why, What, How** – one question per point. Then, get participants to write as many questions as they can think of for each category, and to resist answering them at this stage.

STEP #2 – 'Three Questions'

When the team has exhausted all ideas and angles, review the questions together and invite them to pick the 'Three Most Strategic Questions' to answer – questions whose answers are going to be absolutely key to solving the challenge. This round can be immensely powerful as it drives deep focus and alignment. (*Tip:* If there are lots of questions, groups may struggle to narrow it down to three. Get them to shortlist ten before working it down further.)

STEP #3 – 'Full Circle'

Divide the team into three smaller groups where each will tackle one of the three strategic questions. To give everyone a chance to tackle each question, rotate each group to the next question after every twenty minutes or so, until all the groups have answered all three questions. (*Tip:* Have each question written on a flipchart, and pin these up in three corners of the room. Move each group along to the next station after the set time.)

'Change-Makers' – That's what Team Coaches are. They masterfully create the conditions for deep collaboration, then 'get out of the way', leaving teams to do their best work. Keen to grow a niche in Team Coaching? Start with the three steps. What else have you tried that works powerfully with teams?



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