

PERSONAL PULSE CHECK: The Smartest Leaders Don't Have All the Answers

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I increasingly believe that one of the most important skills we can develop is knowing when we need help, perspective, or simply someone outside the situation to talk things through with.

This is where mentoring and coaching can make such a difference.

Mentoring gives us the opportunity to learn from someone else's experience. Someone who has been through situations we may be facing for the first time. Not someone who tells us what to do but someone who can share what worked for her/him and what didn't, and perhaps most importantly, reassure us that what we are experiencing may not be unusual.

Coaching is different.

A good coach does not give you the answer. Instead, they help you step back from the situation and ask the right questions to help you find your own way forward.

That ability to take a meta position – to step outside the immediate situation and look at it from a different perspective – can be incredibly powerful.

And I think this is particularly relevant in our industry because the promotional products/merch industry is full of people who are passionate about what they do. That is one of our greatest strengths.

But passion can also make it difficult to have a clear vision about future strategy, to make the right decision, and to better focus.

Sometimes we are simply too close to the situation to see it clearly.

A coach or mentor can provide the space to stop, reflect, and ask: What is really happening here? And what is actually the most important thing to focus on?

Clarity creates perspective.

Perspective helps us make better decisions and communicate more effectively.

It is about providing the right tools to create a work environment in which people feel supported, confident enough to develop and help others to do so too, maintain creativity, and focus on the right future strategy.

There can sometimes be an unspoken expectation that asking for a coach or mentor means you are struggling, or that you should already know how to handle a particular situation, especially if you are a manager.

I believe that seeking perspective is a sign of self-awareness, not weakness.

There is also something powerful about creating a culture where this is normal for everyone, not just senior leaders. For example:

A young employee can benefit from a mentor who helps them understand the industry.

A new manager can benefit from someone who has already navigated the transition into leadership, or from a coach to help create clarity and focus alongside the new managerial challenges.

An experienced executive can benefit from a coach who helps them challenge their own assumptions and think differently, and who can tell them what they perhaps do not want to hear.

Pulse Check Recap Insights:

- Choose mentors and coaches who understand your company culture, challenges, and ambitions. The right fit matters – not only in terms of experience, but also personality, values, and perspective.
- Create a network rather than relying on one person. Different people bring different experiences, perspectives, and challenges, and the right person may depend on what you are trying to work through.
- Make asking for perspective part of your culture. Encourage people at every level to seek support, challenge their thinking, and learn from others without seeing it as a sign of weakness.