

A PERFECT PARTNERSHIP: CONFRONTATION



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The Master Coach

Anne Sullivan experienced a difficult childhood, including growing up in orphanages, separation from her siblings after her mother's death, and overcoming a sight-stealing disease called trachoma. Luckily, she regained her eyesight but decided to devote her life to teaching the blind. Sullivan is most known for helping a 7-year-old child out of a dark, silent, and isolating world: Her famous student was named Helen Keller.

Keller was deaf and blind, yet Sullivan taught her to speak and read, leading to Keller becoming one of the most celebrated authors and lecturers of all time. But the road was not easy. It took an extraordinary amount of constructive confrontation on Sullivan's part to help Keller reach her full potential. Keller, who enjoyed a life of pampering from her parents, struggled with this constant confrontation. Yet, it was Sullivan's commitment and dedication to continuously confront Keller on her progress, development, and potential that led to Keller's astonishing achievements—despite her limitations.

The word “*confrontation*” tends to spark negative emotions because it is often associated with a conflict between people's beliefs, actions, and opinions. In coaching, confrontation is a courageous encounter and a critical element of the development process as one faces the truth.

Confrontation in coaching is about holding up a mirror to others so that they can come face-to-face with their abilities, aspirations, and potential—while confronting self-imposed limitations. Great coaches spend much of their time confronting others with their potential and then challenging them to live up to this potential.

The critical question that leaders need to ask themselves is: “*Am I confronting this person to further their interests or my own?*”

Exercise: Should You Confront?

Identify an important conversation that you have been avoiding and answer the following questions:

1. How would having this conversation advance the cause of your work, team, or relationship?
2. What is the worst thing that could happen?
3. Do you care enough about this person or the work to have this conversation?
4. What is the best outcome you can imagine?
5. What's the most potent next step you can take to engage in this conversation?

TIP: When confronting, communicate to the Talent the value you see, your observations of the person's behavior, and the impact the behavior had on you or on others. Make sure they know that your intentions are positive and that they have a voice in the conversation.