

What Does Each Person Need to Hear?

A Practical Guide to Individualized Coaching and Performance

A team doesn't hit a home run. A batter does.

One person. One swing. One moment.

Individual performances by nine distinct players, up to bat one at a time, are what make up a team's season.

The same thing is true on a sales floor, in a boardroom, or in a dugout.

The team never actually performs. People do.

The team is simply the name we give to what happens when enough individuals perform well at the same time. Most coaches and managers already know this.

But very few actually build their coaching and management systems around it.

And that's where things get *interesting*.

The Problem With “Our Team”

Think about the last time you addressed your entire team. Maybe it was a pre-game speech. Maybe a Monday sales meeting, or a performance review, an all-hands meeting, or a motivational email. You probably had good intentions.

You wanted them energized. Focused. Confident. Ready.

So you gave each the same message, the same challenge, and the same encouragement. The same definition of what “ready” looks like. And it probably worked, for some of them.

That's the problem.

Imagine a baseball lineup where every hitter walked to the plate to the exact same song. One player gets fired up by loud guitars and a pounding beat. Another needs something quiet enough to think. Another wants to hear the song that reminds him he's prepared. Another wants the scoreboard, the stakes, and somebody to tell him exactly what he's playing for.

Now imagine playing the same song for all four.

You wouldn't get four people ready to hit.

You'd get four people trying to adapt to the coach's idea of what ready is supposed to sound like.

That's what happens in organizations every day. We call it leadership. And often it just looks like a one-size-fits-all pep talk.

The Destination Is the Same. The Road Isn't.

Every coach and manager wants essentially the same thing from the people on their team:

Walk in ready. Every time.

But readiness doesn't sound the same in everyone. Some people need a challenge. Some need calm. Some need encouragement. Some need stakes. The goal is the same. The activation is different.

In The Walk-Up Protocol these are the four activation styles:

- **The Igniter**
 - Give them a challenge. Give them something to prove.
- **The Anchor**
 - Give them space. Calm confidence. A moment to process before they perform.
- **The Builder**
 - Give them specific encouragement tied to the work they've done. They need to know their preparation has been seen.
- **The Competitor**
 - Give them a scoreboard. Tell them what winning looks like. Stakes and comparison can be their fuel.

None of these is better than another. And most people aren't just one. They're blends. The point isn't to put people into boxes.

The point is to notice what helps each person perform.

Here's Where Good Leaders Get into Trouble

Your natural coaching style probably works. That's why it's your natural style. If you're an Igniter, you may naturally challenge people. If you're a Builder, you may naturally encourage them. If you're a Competitor, you may naturally talk about goals, rankings, and winning. If you're an Anchor, you may naturally give people space. The problem comes when you assume that because it works for you, it will work for them.

Consider a brilliant executive who has suddenly gone quiet in meetings. Your instinct might be to challenge her publicly: *"Come on. What's your opinion? Push back. I know you've got one."*

You mean to draw her out. But what if she's an Anchor? Public pressure doesn't activate her. It shuts her down. The better question might be asked privately:

"What's your honest read on this?"

Then give her room to think.

The answer may come in the next meeting on her terms. Same person. Same talent. Same expectations. Different approach.

And suddenly the "quiet employee" isn't quiet anymore.

The Question That Can Change the Way You Coach

You don't need another personality assessment. You don't need a twelve-page questionnaire. You don't need to become a psychologist. Start with one question. Ask each person privately:

***“What do you need to hear from me
right before it matters most?”***

Then listen. Really listen. Because the answer may tell you more about how to coach that person than a generic leadership model ever will. Then don't stop there.

Watch what happens after a mistake. Watch what happens before a big moment. Watch what happens when you compare people publicly.

- Do they get fired up?
- Do they go quiet?
- Do they look for reassurance?
- Do they immediately want to know the score?

Those moments tell you something.

And if your first read is wrong, that's okay. This isn't a label. It's a living read. People change. Pressure changes people. Success changes people.

The same person may need something different in practice than they need in the championship game. Your job isn't to file people away. Your job is

1. to notice,
2. to adjust,
3. to keep noticing.

So What Does This Mean for Your Team?

It doesn't mean abandoning team motivation and leadership. It means understanding what the team actually is—a group of individuals. So keep your message to the whole team short.

- Identity.
- Purpose.
- What we're here to do.

Then do the part that great coaches and great managers have always done:

Coach the person in front of you.

One player. One employee. One performer. One moment at a time. Because the person standing in front of you already has a song. A song that can change their state. A song that can help them become the version of themselves that is ready for the moment. The question isn't whether they have one.

***The question is whether you've bothered
to learn what it is.***

This Is the Beginning

Your Team Doesn't Need the Same Song goes deeper into the four activation styles, how to recognize them, how to coach each one through the Power, Clutch, and Reset Zones, and how to build a simple Coach's Card for the people you lead.

It's not about treating everyone differently just for the sake of being different. It's about getting better at something great coaches and managers have always understood:

***People don't need you to motivate them your way.
They need you to learn how to reach them their way.***

And when you do?

You may discover that the person you thought wasn't ready was simply waiting for you to play the right song.

Want to chat about the four activation styles or about developing an individualized approach? Grab some time at <https://tidycal.com/walk-up-protocol> and let's chat.

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