

## Even Michael Phelps Needs a Coach

I first heard the platitude quoted in the title of this post many years ago. Back then, the athlete used as an example was Tiger Woods, as in "Even Tiger Woods needs a coach." It's a little trite, but if you look at it closely, it actually has a lot of merit.

The main point of this saying is that no matter how good you are, there's always opportunity to be better and one way to be better is by listening to and incorporating feedback. World class athletes at the top of their sports still learn from their coaches, who are able to provide guidance based on things like direct observation and performance statistics. Applying this example to the workplace, even high performing employees can improve their performance when given sound guidance by their supervisor or mentor. Some CEOs even hire executive coaches to help them improve their effectiveness.

The other take away from this saying is that it's okay to be coached. Many people feel threatened by feedback because they view it as criticism rather than an opportunity to improve their game. When people feel threatened they get defensive and that makes them unreceptive to feedback. Real improvement may not be possible unless employees change their perception of feedback and open their minds to it.

Because of the pervasive monitoring that occurs in contact centers, agents can receive feedback about their performance daily, and even multiple times per day. That's a lot of feedback. In fact, I would be hard-pressed to name very many other professions that receive so much performance feedback. If not handled correctly, that much feedback can feel like death from a thousand cuts.

But maybe this unique characteristic also holds a key to making more agents ok with receiving so much feedback. If it's such a big part of the job, why not put it in the job description? Under duties, why not include "responsible for receiving feedback and using it to alter and improve performance?" This would help set expectations right from the beginning of employment. Recruiters could talk to it. More importantly, it would remind supervisors to cover it during their orientation discussions with new agents. The message of these discussions would not only be a heads up that plenty of feedback is coming their way, but also reassurance that it's just the nature of the job. Supervisors should do what they can to make agents comfortable with receiving feedback.

Afterall, even Michael Phelps needs a coach.