

CASE 5.1

Marathon Runners at Different Levels

David Abruzzo is the newly elected president of the Metrocity Striders Track Club (MSTC). One of his duties is to serve as the coach for runners

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who hope to complete the New York City Marathon. Because David has run many marathons and ultramarathons successfully, he feels quite comfortable assuming the role and responsibilities of coach for the marathon runners.

The training period for runners intending to run New York is 16 weeks. During the first couple of weeks of training, David was pleased with the progress of the runners and had little difficulty in his role as coach. However, when the runners reached Week 8, the halfway mark, some things began to occur that raised questions in David's mind regarding how best to help his runners. The issues of concern seemed quite different from those that David had expected to hear from runners in a marathon-training program. All in all, the runners and their concerns could be divided into three different groups.

One group of runners, most of whom had never run a marathon, peppered the coach with all kinds of questions. They were very concerned about how to do the marathon and whether they had the ability to complete such a challenging event successfully. They asked questions about how far to run in training, what to eat, how much to drink, and what kind of shoes to wear. One runner wanted to know what to eat the night before the marathon, and another wanted to know whether it was likely that he would pass out when he crossed the finish line. For David the questions were never-ending and rather basic. He wanted to treat the runners like informed adults, but they seemed to be acting immature, and rather childish.

The second group of runners, all of whom had finished the New York City Marathon in the previous year, seemed most concerned about the effects of training on their running. For example, they wanted to know precisely how their per-week running mileage related to their possible marathon finishing time. Would running long practice runs help them through the wall at the 20-mile mark? Would taking a rest day during training actually help their overall conditioning? Basically, the runners in this group seemed to want assurances from David that they were training in the right way for New York. For David, talking to this group was easy because he enjoyed giving them encouragement and motivational pep talks.

A third group was made up of seasoned runners, most of whom had run several marathons and many of whom had finished in the top 10 of their respective age divisions. Sometimes they complained of feeling flat and acted a bit moody and down about training. Even though they had confidence in their ability to compete and finish well, they lacked an element of excitement about running in the New York event. The occasional

questions they raised usually concerned such things as whether their overall training strategy was appropriate or whether their training would help them in other races besides the New York City Marathon. Because of his running experience, David liked to offer running tips to this group. However, when he did, he felt like the runners ignored and discounted his suggestions. He was concerned that they may not appreciate him or his coaching.

Questions

1. Based on the principles of the SLII® model, how would you describe the runners in Group 1? What kind of leadership do they want from David, and what kind of leadership does David seem prepared to give them?
2. How would you describe the fit between the runners in Group 2 and David's coaching style? Discuss.
3. The experienced runners in Group 3 appear to be a challenge to David. Using SLII®, explain why David appears ineffective with this group.
4. If you were helping David with his coaching, how would you describe his strengths and weaknesses? What suggestions would you make to him about how to improve?