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Leadership



Coaching for success

Coaching is not about making people happy or creating a feel good environment. Coaching is your foundation for activating talent, advancing performance and improving the bottom line.

What is coaching?

To be a successful leader you have to be successful with people. More now than ever to be an effective leader you also have to be an effective coach.

Coaching is about leaders not doing the work for their team, but knowing exactly how to help their people find and action their personal best.

Regardless of how good you are at your job, and no matter how good the products, services and information you convey to the public about sustainable practices; unless you know about how to get the best from your people, your message will always fall short of its potential.

Don't have the time?

Make it. The diagram below represents how the high workload leader who doesn't have time but bounces from one crisis to another does not have a sustainable future themselves!

Breaking this cycle of being driven by the workload, finding limited time for staff and therefore carrying all or a large proportion of the responsibility just doesn't equate to achieving good performance or retaining great people.



The simple message? Make time. Develop and utilise your coaching skills to bring out the best in others because both now and into the foreseeable future; the soft skills and managing people is the key to delivering hard business results.

Make no mistake. This is not just about making people happy or creating a feel good environment. It is the foundation for outstanding performance and improving the bottom line.

Coaching types.

There are three broad categories for coaching that could be utilised depending on the circumstance for undertaking the coaching conversation.

Success coaching is often done proactively prior to the person being confronted with the event or task, where by improvement or performance coaching methods is done in response to situations that arise.

The following information helps to clarify the purpose and situations when different methods of coaching would be used.

Success

Guiding people towards success in new challenges or situations.

- Taking on a new position of responsibility such as preparing a budget or work schedules
- Learning a new skill, task or job function such as using new equipment or software
- Working with new partners, joint ventures, work structures or work groups
- Handling a new or difficult situation such as making a major presentation or leading a difficult meeting

Improvement

Guiding people to improve unacceptable performance or work habits.

- Missing work or coming in late, socialising or using internet for non-work related purposes
- Disrupting meetings or being impatient or uncooperative with colleagues
- Missing deadlines or sales targets or going over budget
- Receiving low ratings from customers or having unacceptable error rates

Managing performance

Addressing chronic performance or work habit problems or serious misconduct.

- Continuing to fall short of sales targets, production goals or business performance indicators
- Repeatedly arriving late or calling in sick
- Violating a major safety rule or procedure
- Threatening or harassing a colleague

Remember!

Whatever coaching style you are using needs to be consistent with your body language, tone of voice and vocabulary to avoid mixed or confusing messages being delivered.

It would be misleading for a coach, due to their apprehension or lack of clarity and or confidence, to convey inconsistent messages to the person being coached.

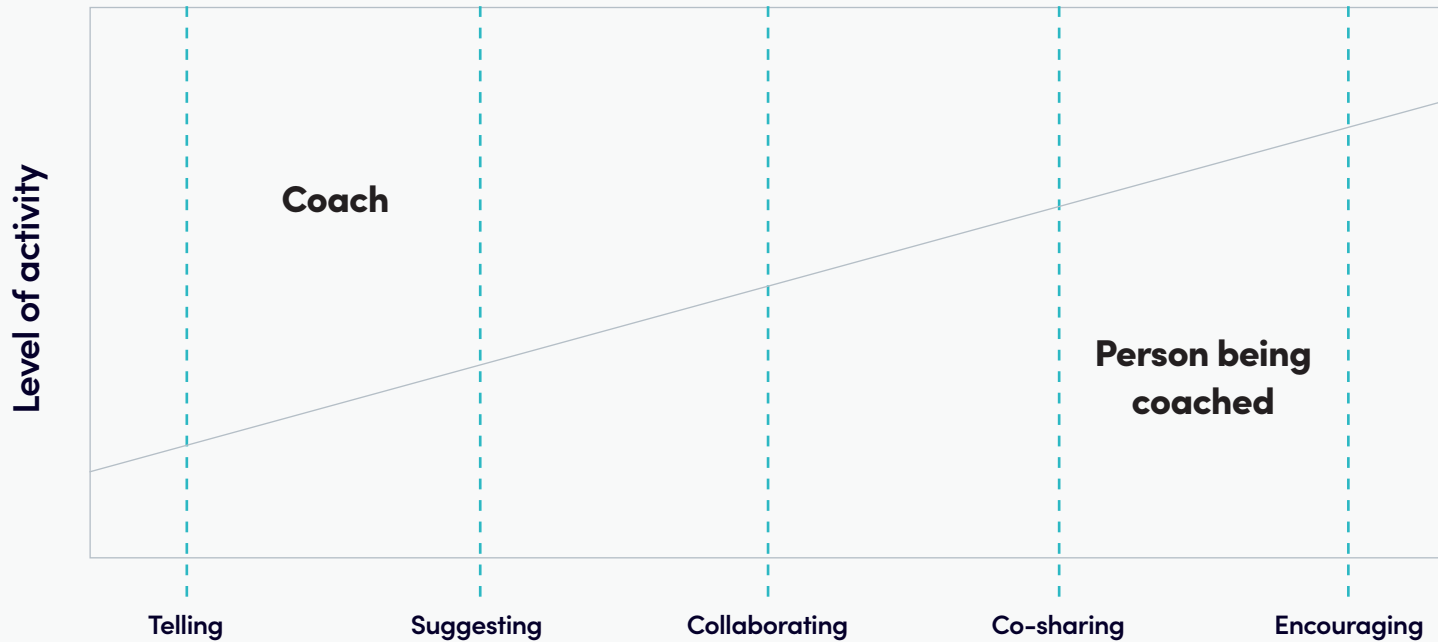
Your planning, preparation and coaching planner will assist prepare yourself and the conversation to ensure the outcome for both you and the coachee is beneficial.

Coaching styles.

Coaching is not suitable for every situation or circumstance.

The following model helps to recognise that various forms of coaching may be utilised depending on the situation and timeframe available.

Prescriptive -----> Non-Prescriptive



You as the manager will always be assessing the environment, employee and situation to ascertain which level of coaching to apply - and indeed if coaching is appropriate.

The diagram above highlights the more direction and involvement by the coach indicates a more telling focus which may apply in the situations below.

- A new employee learning their roles and responsibilities;
- In the process of change where new processes or systems are being implemented;
- For an existing employee undergoing performance issues that require addressing.

The other end of the continuum suggests an autonomous coaching process where the person being coached has more influence. Situations where this is most suitable would include:

- A long-term staff member that desires to continue to be capable in their role;
- An employee wanting to talk about undertaking an increased level of responsibility;
- A self motivated employee seeking guidance for professional development options.

Coaching - the microskills.

There are a number of skills that help or hinder effective communication let alone actual coaching conversations. These are the skills used every day however over time, and often under time or work pressures, are simply forgotten or ignored.

Although easy to read and think that you are doing each of them, be aware and ensure your conversation incorporates the helpful skills and minimises the hindering ones.

Helpful skills

- Genuine and effective listening
- Ask open ended questions - probing
- Eye contact without staring
- Same level - whether sitting or standing
- Open body language
- Direct conversation toward them
- Recognise positives not just negatives
- Seek first to understand then be understood
- Be assertive (not aggressive)
- Summarise/seek clarification
- Gain understanding
- Develop agreement of actions
- Challenge beliefs constructively
- Asking open questions to encourage talking
- Being honest and authentic to your intent
- Conducting in a good space/time of day
- Being prepared
- Empathy triangle - power, care and trust

This list is not insignificant! Look closely and give yourself a sense check about how well you perform in your day to day function against each list.

Hindering skills

- Arms crossed
- Pointing the finger
- Threaten/be aggressive/positional
- Tone of voice is monotone or condescending
- Provide solutions
- Interrupts regularly
- Absent listening - thinking of your own views
- Filtering comments when other's are talking
- Not maintain eye contact
- Yelling or seeming frustrated
- Discuss delicate issues in public
- Being vague/insincere
- Judging others
- Being time poor or under time pressure
- Making solutions that are not mutually owned
- Preconceiving an outcome so limiting possibility
- Being vague or seeming to be absent
- Just not making the time

Is there room for improvement?

It is often a lack of these smaller skills that leads to larger issues that create poor conversations. Take the time to master these foundational skills to great communication and you will see a difference in the way people relate, respond and collaborate with you.

CUES - the coaching backbone.

Communication

- Establish 2 points of connection
- Bridging question or statement
- Foster genuine talking and listening

How are you going?
 What would you like to discuss today?
 Have you had any thoughts about project X?
 What's happening for you right now?

Understanding

- Establish the fundamental issue(s)
- Use open and exploratory questions
- Suspend personal filters and judgement

Tell me more about that scenario/situation?
 How did that make you feel?
 Where else has this occurred for you?
 What did you think worked for you?
 What's important to you about that?

Explore options

- Discover possibilities by asking questions
- Help individuals draw out consequences
- Generate a range of possibilities and options

What would you like to achieve?
 How will you make this happen?
 What are the steps you need to take?
 How will we measure success?
 Who else do you need to consider/consult?

Solution

- Choose an option(s) to action
- Check liveability of the option(s)

Is there anything that could get in your way?
 What might go wrong?

- Schedule follow up

Coaching principles.

1

Be present. Be open. It is what you know that limits you.

- Our perspective is just that – our perspective
- Use what you know as merely a good departure point Seek first to understand and then focus on being understood
- The greatest complement you can pay someone is to truly listen to them and understand their perspective

2

Things are not always as they seem!

- All the information we see and receive is put through the filter of our thinking and experience
- Be aware what you see and hear may not be what's occurring, intended or being communicated!
- Clarify to truly understand perspective before forming opinions, making judgments or deciding outcomes

3

Coaching is less about who is right and more about what is right.

- Leaving behind what is right, using facts or drawing up evidence to prove a position will enhance communication and coaching outcomes
- Being positional just encourages others to defend the position - free things up by asking questions not presenting position

4

You have two ears and one mouth - use them in proportion!

- Experienced coaches listen 80% of the time and talk for 20%
- Great questions don't need huge amounts of context or explanation; they can exist on their own and have more impact when delivered succinctly
- Get comfortable with silence. It is often where new thinking is formed!

5

The first solution and you creating the solution are rarely the best.

- The journey of seeing, exploring and choosing from a range of options can often be the catalyst for people owning and acting upon that solution

Overcoming emotional barriers.

1

Asking 3 to 5 questions

No engagement or disinterest in the conversation

- May I ask three questions before we make the decision to finish?
- What is it about the conversation that doesn't interest you?
- Are there things in particular that concern you?
- What, if we could solve today, would help things from your perspective?

2

Common ground or current reality

Indifference to possibilities or low collaboration

- **Step 1**
Disturb the thought pattern:
I've just realised something interesting...
- **Step 2**
Surmise both perspectives:
Start with their view first!
- **Step 3**
Identify common ground:
You know we both really desire X and Y
- **Step 4**
Get future focused:
How can we both get what we want?

3

Balcony view

To aid in defining the key issue(s) requiring discussion

- If you were sitting above this scenario/situation and looking down on it from a balcony...

What would you say are the key issues we need to discuss?

What is the one area we need to focus on?

What is the one thing we could shift today that would make a difference?

4

Magic wand

Can not describe or explain what the future looks like

- If you had a magic wand and could wave your hands and make things exactly how you would like them to be...

What would you wish for?

How would your current situation be different?

What would have changed from how you think/feel/are placed today?

5

Homework

Don't know next steps

- This process involves one or both people having set tasks to think about, research or decide upon around the issues that are creating barriers; giving a set timeframe to the next meeting where outcomes are discussed/decided.

Contextual listening.

Contextual listening is a method that moves beyond just active listening and focusing on the words, to discern all there is to be heard and understood. It involves listening for clues, asking questions to draw out context and saying what you heard to verify understanding.

Although a developed skill once foundational skills of active listening and effective communication have been developed, contextual listening cues, and possible questions, can be remembered through the acronym of SEARCH.

Although not a process to work through from S through to H, SEARCH will help raise your own awareness about the deeper context operating in a conversation and where you may want to further explore.

Situation

- What is the situation?
 - What is the real issue being described?
 - What is happening beyond what's being explained?
-

Emotions

- How does this person really feel?
 - What is the core issue(s) that is driving their behaviour?
 - What is the cause of their emotions?
 - How are the emotions helping or hindering progress?
-

Actions

- What has been tried so far?
 - How have the person's actions helped or hindered?
 - What needs to shift to create better actions/outcomes?
 - Are the actions driven from emotion or positive intention?
-

Response

- What responses are being experienced? Why?
 - Why have actions been received positively/negatively?
 - Can the person describe the response they desire?
 - Is blame just being leveled with no personal responsibility?
-

Choice

- How are choices and decisions being defined?
 - What choices are available?
 - How have choices been determined or made?
-

How did it go

- How is the person assessing the situation?
- Are actions being taken considered or reactive?
- What to date has helped or hindered progress?

These questions of course are not a complete list. Listening for context is critical to be able to understand the complete landscape for the issue you are coaching. It is one of the core skills to ensure you diagnose the fundamental issue rather than the symptoms being presented as part of the coaching conversation.

Advocacy & inquiry.

There exists a myriad of elements and nuances to a successful coaching conversation which can be discovered and practiced over time. Although each important as the other, the ability to use advocacy and inquiry is paramount to a successful conversation.

An experienced leader/coach will often consider for themselves, as well as their coachee, a few simple questions:

- What is my intention in this conversation?
- Am I more interested in learning or in prevailing?
- What are my beliefs and assumptions, and am I willing to change them?
- What outcome matters most to me?

Learning the answers to these questions, and entering a coaching exchange with a stance of awareness, openness, curiosity and reflection, may help you to have a far more satisfying, productive and ultimately effective conversation.

What is advocacy and inquiry?

Advocacy is an approach that uses the mental model where by effective communication is undertaken with a genuine desire to relate to others with dignity and curiosity.

“We need to work together to understand and address the real issues. I don’t have all the information. I may even be inferring incorrectly. My job is to learn and to help others learn so that we can create the best possible outcome. That is how I gain respect in the company.”

Advocation, Harvard Business Review, 2003

Productive advocacy

Productive advocacy helps to move collective thinking from a coaching conversation forward, to create shared understanding and direction, and to turn words and ideas into coordinated action. Advocacy productively requires awareness of yourself and others, skills in speaking and listening, sensitivity, respectfulness and humility.

Strategies for successful advocacy include:

- Discover the key assumptions, biases and presuppositions of the conversation
- Discover your reasoning, your data, your concerns and your goals
- If you have doubts, concerns or apprehension then share it openly and honestly
- If you have opinions or points of view then acknowledge them and own them, however don’t be limited by defending them as right or the only way
- Inquire into others reactions or responses to your views and perspective
- Acknowledge to yourself and others that you might be wrong

Productive inquiry

Productive inquiry is the essential companion to productive advocacy. This kind of inquiry is more than knowing what questions to ask and learning how to ask them skillfully. Productive inquiry is a method of engagement, a way to be present with yourself and with others.

Attentiveness and genuine curiosity are your most important tools if you wish to inquire effectively – that, and the willingness to really listen to the other person. The more carefully you listen, the more productive and effective your conversation will be.

Strategies for successful inquiry include:

- Explain why you are inquiring, and display your assumptions, biases or concerns
- Focus your inquiry on learning, not on proving yourself right or the coachee wrong
- Hold your thoughts and judgments lightly
- Make your reasoning apparent: “I believe that you want to reduce your existing time pressures, so I am puzzled to hear that you intend to take on the XY project.”
- Be curious and strive to understand the coachee’s reasoning or thought patterns
- Don’t ask questions unless you are genuinely interested in the other person’s response

How do I balance advocacy and inquiry?

The power of productive advocacy and inquiry compounds when you use them together. It is never enough in a coaching conversation to advocate or inquire only.

If you only advocate, you will not learn about potential flaws in your own thinking. The practice of advocacy alone may prevent the best possible outcome from being developed.

If you only inquire, you may deprive others from hearing your insights, an alternate view that may strengthen or change the direction of the conversation. By not inquiring as a coach, you might perpetuate faulty thinking that can lead to faulty decisions later.

Different coaching approaches and outcomes are often a function of different levels of advocacy and inquiry throughout your coaching relationship:

- ↑ advocacy and ↑ inquiry leads to **collaboration and learning**
- ↑ advocacy and ↓ inquiry leads to **forcing and pushing**
- ↓ advocacy and ↑ inquiry leads to **easing and accommodating**
- ↓ advocacy and ↓ inquiry leads to **withdrawing and withholding**

Coaching models.

Matching the right coaching conversation to the issue and/or person is critical to ensure effective results are achieved. The coaching continuum demonstrates the range of possibilities, and choosing the approach to gain the most effective outcome is critical.

Regardless of the approach taken, it is very important to structure the coaching conversation. Coaching is essentially a structured, outcome directed conversation to bring about positive purposeful change.

Below are three useful models to assist structure your approach, process and questioning depending on the purpose of your coaching session.

GROW model

Goal

When using GROW, the coaching conversation most often starts with goal setting. Even if the coachee is somewhat unsure as to what they want to achieve, the coach inquires as to what they want to do, address or achieve.

- What would like to discuss today?
- What do you want to get out of the session?
- How would you know our time has been well spent?

Reality

The reality discussion is just that – it's about discussing and detailing what the reality of the situation is. Not what the coachee would like it to be, but what's really happening.

- What are the key factors at play here?
- How is the situation presenting itself to you right now?
- What's working/not working?
- What needs to shift for you?

Options

Next you need to look at possible options. These may not come immediately, and using some of the emotional barriers may assist here, as the focus is to make sure you look beyond the obvious or immediate suggestions.

- What can be done to change the situation?
- How can you move closer towards your goal?
- How have you overcome this in the past?
- What can you leverage from that experience?

What next?

Before closing off any session it is important to wrap up the discussion, reflect on what has been achieved or agreed to assist move the coachee forward and leave with positive intentions. Without an action plan, the coachee may lose drive and commitment and lose momentum.

- List specific tasks or actions they/you will do
- What sort of things might stop you being successful?
- What will you do if you find these things getting in your way?
- How will you know if you are moving forward?

GROW adaptations

I-GROW

In this adaptation the I stands for issues. Sometimes it is useful to spend time looking at broader context and issues before you start defining goals. The I-GROW model can be useful when the coachee is very problem focused or overwhelmed with the issues at hand.

In these situations, pushing them towards a goal may alienate them. The leader/coach must be in tune with the unspoken needs of their team members, however always wary that too much time focusing on the issues, may prevent an effective conversation.

RE-GROW

For on-going coaching sessions or arrangements the RE-GROW approach can be useful. The coach reviews the coachee's progress and evaluates the progress towards their goals. Taking time for this review and whether agreed action has been taken and followed through, gives the coach a good indication as to the coachee's engagement towards change.

Like the I-GROW approach, be aware of time as without diligence to the coaching session, time can be quickly absorbed in the review stage. Be particularly aware this can be the case in instances of success and distress as your coachee in both circumstances may have a lot to share and want to discuss.

CIGAR model

The GROW models and adaptations are excellent tools, however when goals are already established from above, or as part of a project's scope, it is useful to use a gap analysis approach. The leader/coach needs to assist the coachee understand what's happening right now, define where they need to be, examine what creates the gap and create an action plan for achievement.

The CIGAR model is far more linear than the GROW model and is particularly useful when the goal is already defined or there are organisational objectives, such as projects or timeframes, to reach; and the coachee does not have the power or authority to set their own goals.

C Current situation

I Ideal outcome

G Gap between C and I

A Action plan

R Review

Like the coaching backbone and GROW model and adaptations, the key to delivering exceptional coaching results is through questioning and effective coaching skills. The process is merely a road map for your coaching purpose, not the critical success factor for achieving outstanding outcomes for the coachee, you as a leader/coach and the business.

Coaching and YOU.

Leaders of the future must invest themselves and their time in becoming a better coach.

Whatever has transpired, grabbed you, frustrated you or challenged you as a leader up until now, it is what you do with this information, knowledge and skill set that will see you progress and prosper or perish.

Be acutely aware that by the very choices you are making, you are creating your future right now. Your actions today become your outcomes tomorrow.

New learning will often involve a reduced level of comfort as new skills take time to become acquired skills. Focusing each experience, whether positive or otherwise, on the future enables effort and energy to be harnessed and directed towards your next success.

You can take chances or take safety nets, make miracles or make mistakes. You don't have to be composed at all hours to be an effective leader. You don't have to be bold or certain to be brave. You don't have to have all the answers, or even know exactly what to do all of the time. Just take a step.

From Check Up from the Neck Up by Andrew Horsfield

I truly hope you embrace and celebrate the path of learning and make a conscious decision to become better; simply because the alternative is to become worse.

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