

# COACHING SKILLS FOR MANAGERS

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## Background

The 'coaching culture' continues to expand such that coaching is now a component mainstream part of Human Resource

Development for many organisations (Palmer, Neenan, 2001.

Sommers, 2001). There are a number of definitions of Coaching, but one that relates directly to managers is that coaching is:

*"A process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve. To be a successful a Coach requires a knowledge and understanding of process as well as the variety of styles, skills and techniques that are appropriate to the context in which the coaching takes place" (Parsloe, 1999)*

Coaching is growing in popularity because of the value it adds to staff relationships, team working, as well as individual and organisational productivity. No one has yet been able to provide a globally agreed model for evaluating the ROI that coaching makes. However, what studies do exist demonstrate a variety of return figures. Examples include the Metrix Global Study (Anderson, 2001). The lack of consensus and continuity in these studies leads one to question the figure but not the fact that ROI is a fact.

It is now common place for managers to be required to take on more of a coaching role with their direct reports (Parsloe, 1999). A 'Coaching Culture' means moving away from the traditional control and command model, into one which encourages independent working and responsibility amongst employees. A coaching approach fosters a more self-directed way of working. As Redshaw states in his 2001 article, "Do we really understand coaching? How can we make it work better?" for the Industrial and Commercial Training Journal:

*“Coaching has enormous benefits for both organisations and for the individuals they employ. When good coaching is widespread, the whole organisation can learn new things more quickly and therefore can adapt to change more effectively. Individuals not only learn the new skills they are coached in, they also become better and proactive learners. For coaching to be effective in an organisation, a supportive climate is required; one where coaching is regarded as a normal part of managing and where greater importance is placed on learning from mistakes than on blaming people for them. This is too often overlooked by many organisations which wish to introduce coaching. Effective coaching requires that both organisations and the learning establishments that support them, adopt a more informed strategy to develop coaches and to build and maintain a climate where coaching can happen”*

## **What are Coaching Skills?**

A number of different approaches to coaching exist. Currently, these include Transpersonal, Solution Focussed Coaching, Cognitive-Behavioural and Co-Active. Although many individuals train as professional coaches, with a number of courses, being university accredited starting from basic certificated training through to that of PhD, the basic skills of coaching are now often taught to managers in the form of two to four day training programmes (Leimon, Moscovici, McMahan, 2005).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s managers were often offered the opportunity of undertaking “Counselling Skills” training as a way of improving an individual’s communication skills within existing teams thereby enabling the manager to deal more effectively with the people side of management, and with an individual’s development.

However, the term ‘counselling’ was often felt to be an inappropriate one as it tended to suggest that those who would benefit from such interventions, were linked to the needs of a clinical population. The term coaching has none of these negative connotations and is regarded as a way of helping individuals to maximise their performance. Indeed the term “performance coaching” is now commonly used. However, it is interesting to note that the basic communication skills used in coaching such as paraphrasing, summarising and use of body language are taken directly from counselling skills but are now usually renamed either ‘coaching’ or ‘basic communication skills’.

One very common model for helping managers develop coaching skills is that devised by Sir John Whitmore (2002) entitled ‘The GROW Model’. It provides a simple framework that can be applied by the Manager.

**G**oals – The setting of goals is intrinsic to coaching – if you don't know where you are going how will you know if you have achieved that which you set out to. The coach asks specific questions of the individual in order to ensure that the goal is in the best interests of the client and those closest with whom he/she interacts.

**R**eality – the client needs to have a realistic grasp of where they are now, where they are starting from, and whether his or her goal is a realistic goal and can be achieved.

**O**ptions – the coaching manager guides the individual in thinking of a number of ways of achieving the goal(s) and the individual decides how he or she will pursue this. Although the manager needs to manage, and no one wishes to deny the fact that there will

be times when he or she has to direct an individual when using the coaching process, the manager does not aim to lead the individual but rather assist the person explore possibilities so they can decide which option is best for them. The philosophical position being that by doing this, the individual is more likely to develop creative ways of approaching problems that can be used successfully in the future without the need to resume the coaching process. In effect, this part of the process is more akin to self-directed learning.

**Will/Wrap-up** – the client will only achieve a goal if he or she is motivated to do so. Therefore the manager assists the individual to look at the possible obstacles he/she may encounter and how these can be overcome. In addition, the manager helps the person consider whether there is a secondary gain to be had in the client not achieving the goal. For instance, it may be more comfortable to remain in the current position than make the effort it takes to achieve the goal he/she has in mind.

The GROW Model works because it ensures that there is nothing which might prevent the client from going for the goal. It checks whether the goal itself fits with the individual's capabilities, ambitions, personal and professional values and establishes whether the client needs to change current behaviours or requires new skills in order to successfully obtain their desired goal(s).

Another Model that is also successfully used to hold the coaching process together is the Seven Stage Problem Solving Model (Wasik, 1984).

Neenan and Palmer (2002) assert that presenting individuals with a problem-solving model to follow may seem at first glance to stifle their creativity, but thinking things through in a structured and systematic way actually encourages it. McMahon (2002) also used

this model as a way of providing individuals with a structure that can be used for both professional and personal goal setting.

The seven-step problem-solving sequence and accompanying questions that people can ask themselves at each step:

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Questions/Actions</i>
1. Problem identification	What's the problem/challenge?
2. Goal selection	What do I want to achieve?
3. Generation of alternatives	What can I do to achieve my goal?
4. Consideration of the consequences	What are the pros and cons?
5. Decision making	What am I going to do?
6. Implementation	Time to do it!

7. Evaluation	What worked and why and do I need to amend my action plan?
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Once the person becomes adept at using the seven-step model, he may want to use a shorter model to quicken the problem-solving process (Neenan, Palmer, 2002). For example, STIR and PIE:

Select a problem	<b>P</b> roblem definition
Target a solution	<b>I</b> mplement a solution
Implement a solution	<b>E</b> valuate outcome
<b>R</b> eview outcome	

These shorter models of problem-solving are usually used for rapid processing of a problem in order to deal with a crisis or make a

quick decision. With these shorter models, deliberation is exchanged for speed, so it is possible that a less satisfactory outcome may be experienced by the person.

The models above provide the structure for coaching to take place, and once the process is understood, the manager is then provided with the basic coaching skills that he or she will require in order to make the coaching effective.

The micro-skills of coaching include helping the manager develop the skills and attitudes to help and individual manage situations from within their own resources (Egan, 2004). During this stage of the training, the individual is introduced to the concepts of Empathy, Respect and Genuineness.

Empathy being the ability to put oneself in the shoes of the other person which requires the manager to be able to tentatively explore the individual's thoughts and feelings while putting aside personal thoughts and/or prejudices. In addition, by showing an understanding for the individual, this assists the person concerned to explore his or her own ideas and feelings in a safe way.

Respect is the ability to refrain from judgement of the person as an individual, regardless of individual responses to that person's actions. If an individual fears being unfairly or less favourably judged, then he or she may provide the information the manager wants to hear and not that which is actually attached to the situation in question. As a manager is involved in the appraisal of staff, this can prove a challenge for both the manager and his or her direct report. After all, the Manager is making judgements about the individual's ability and there is an expectation that he/she will do so by the organization. Indeed, he or she may be responsible for

providing information that could directly impact on an individual's promotion prospects and/or any bonuses that may be due. For the manager to use effective coaching skills he or she needs to be clear with the individual as to the boundaries that exist between those occasions when he or she is engaging in what could be termed good management practice using coaching skills, and those occasions when a more formal direct line management approach is being used. However, if a manager is using coaching skills to assist an individual improve performance, this process is unlikely to be successful if the individual perceives the manager as being antagonistic.

Genuineness relates to the ability to remain sincere and genuine. If a manager has a reputation for breaking confidences, or speaking to others in an indiscriminate manner about individuals, it is likely that any protestations of assistance will be seen as genuine.

The qualities of empathy, respect and genuineness being those identified by Carl Rogers (Thorne, 2003) as being core to developing effective rapport.

Skills Training then goes on to include the skills of what has been termed 'Active Listening'. Active Listening is a process whereby through using a set of micro-skills, the listener is intent on listening for meaning. The goal of active listening is to improve mutual understanding.

The micro-skills of active listening include:

- Attending ( *i.e. mirroring and matching the body language of the other person*)
- Listening to the end of the sentence
- Paraphrasing – content ( *i.e. encapsulating the factual essence of what is being said and feeding this back*)

- Reflecting feeling – emotion ( *i.e. catching the explicitly expressed or inferred emotion. For example: it sounds as if you were disappointed*”)
- Summarizing information
- Asking for examples of what an individual has tried in order to deal with the situation or about the ways that the challenges being faced are impacting on performance
- Using Open Questions ( *i.e. those starting with what, where, when, how and why as a way of getting an individual to expand on his/her situation and/or thoughts or emotions*)
- Minimal Encouragers ( *i.e. the use of simple terms such as “ah ha”, “mmm” etc to acknowledge that information has been understood without interrupting.*)

In Egan’s Problem Management Model, there are three stages.

Stage One is termed, “Exploration” and here the manager would be encouraged to simply allow the other person to fully expand upon

his or her situation, thoughts and feelings. During this stage, the manager, using coaching skills, would attempt only to fully illicit information about the situation rather than attempting to assist the individual resolve it. Egan believes that the success of this stage lies in the ability of the individual to fully explore the situation while the manager facilitates this process.

During Stage Two, entitled “Understanding”, the manager as coach would use the skills of probing and challenging to assist the individual to think more deeply about what is happening thereby helping the person look for his or her contribution to the situation, those aspects that he or she has not explored, or those aspects that could be termed, ‘blind spots.

Stage Three is called the ‘Action’ Stage and it is during this stage that the individual is encouraged to consider what he or she needs

to do in order to change the situation and how to go about enacting such changes.

One aspect of successful coaching is ensuring that the goals set by the individual are clear and realistic and as such, managers are often introduced to the SMART model for goal setting (Neenan, Dryden, 2001) in order to achieve this. The concept of SMART goals is one that has been used on a variety of training courses within business and industry to assist individuals in their problem solving efforts.

**S**pecific = ensuring that a goal is stated in specific terms (i.e.

*‘to make a presentation to the board at the next quarterly meeting regarding the advantages of a global strategic response’*)

**M**easurable = ensuring that goals can be measured (*i.e. either the individual will make the presentation concerned or not*)

**A**chievable = checking to see that the goal can be achieved (*i.e. can this goal be achieved in the time available or is the goal itself even achievable?*)

**R**ealistic = is this goal within the person's ability (*i.e. is this a subject the person knows about, can talk about and is within their professional scope or does the person need additional training?*)

**T**ime Bound = what timeframe does the goal need to be achieved in (*i.e. the date of the next quarterly Board Meeting*)

Behavioural Contracting is another way of achieving a clear set of measurable outcomes (McMahon, 2005). A Behavioural Contract sees the manager asking the client what general objectives he or

she may be seeking and then seeks to break these down into a set of measurable outcomes. For example, an individual may be taking on too much work some of which is of a non-essential nature due to his or her inability to say ‘no’ and may state that he or she wants to be able to be more “*assertive with others*” which would be seen as an overall objective. However, this would then translate into a series of outcomes such as, “*identifying mechanisms to identify non-essential pieces of work*” and “*demonstrating the ability to say ‘no’ to non-essential items*”. Both of these outcomes can be measured as the mechanism for identifying non-essential pieces of work as well as identifying those situations where the individual said no can be noted and observed by the individual him or herself as well as others.

## **Case Study**

John was the Branch Manager of a group of 10 branches of a major High Street Retail organisation. He had recently taken up this appointment having spent the previous 5 years successfully managing a group of 5 branches in the North West. His previous success had resulted in his recent promotion.

John was enthusiastic and his high-energy style had always served him well in the past. He came across as self confident. However, he confided in his manager, the Regional Director, that he was starting to lack confidence in his ability to tackle these new challenges and his Director offered to support him in his new role.

At the initial meeting, his manager helped him establish the two areas that required attention - his leadership style and his lack of change management skills. One of his goals was stated as “*to identify my leadership style together with the associated strengths and weaknesses*”.

Using the GROW Model his Manager assisted John to identify that whilst he perceived his style to be fairly inclusive and democratic, his new team saw him as highly directive and having little tolerance of under-performance. Although this style had worked for him in the past, it was apparent that he needed to try a more collaborative approach with his new and more experienced management team.

From discussions, it was apparent that John had received minimal training in the skills required to effectively lead change. His manager suggested that he should contact the training department who, in turn, recommended a reading list which included a number

of books, articles, and case studies for him to read in his own time as well as arranging for him to attend a series of management and managing change seminars.

In combining his desire to develop a more inclusive leadership style with his increasing knowledge of effective change management, he worked on a strategy for his new role. This included identifying a core team from within his group who would guide and inform the process; including both managers and clerical staff. The core team were responsible for identifying a vision for the newly structured group, communicating this within their teams, and feeding back both best practice and obstacles to the programme.

His manager met with him at first on a regular basis but as it became apparent that John was now managing his team more effectively on a less frequent basis. The coaching skills approach used by his Regional Director strengthened their relationship

which, in turn, led to a more productive way of working between them and also helped John develop a new set of skills that benefited the organisation, his staff team and the profitability of the organisation.

## **Summary**

Coaching skills are now part of everyday corporate life and managers from all sectors are being increasingly asked to take on the style of a 'coaching manager' for which appropriate training is given. A number of different training models to teach coaching skills exists some of which are philosophically at odds with each other. However, at the most basic level they are all based on what can be called 'basic coaching skills' using the techniques of Active Listening within a structured framework. Managers who are trained in such skills have found them useful in dealing with the

day-to-day issues of person management and in creating a more self-directed learning environment for staff.

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