

Unlocking potential

Gladeana McMahon outlines the basics for bringing managers up to speed on coaching

The 'coaching culture' continues to expand and coaching is now a mainstream part of human resource development for many organisations. There are a number of definitions of coaching, but one that relates directly to managers is that coaching is "directly concerned with the immediate improvement of performance and development of skills".¹

Coaching is growing in popularity because of the value it adds to staff relationships and team working, as well as to individual and organisational productivity. No-one has yet been able to provide a globally agreed model for evaluating the ROI that coaching makes, however the studies that do exist demonstrate a variety of return figures (see the *Metrix Global ROI Study of MC Anderson* for more detail²).

It is now commonplace for managers to be required to take on more of a coaching role with those who report to them directly. A 'coaching culture' means moving away from the traditional control and command model, into one that encourages independent working and responsibility among employees. A coaching approach fosters a more self-directed way of working.

What are coaching skills?

A number of different approaches to coaching exist. Currently, these include transpersonal; solution-focused coaching; cognitive-behavioural, and co-active.

Although many individuals train as professional coaches, the basic skills of coaching are now available to managers in the form of two- to four-day training programmes.

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ance coaching' is now commonly used. One very common model for helping managers develop coaching skills is the GROW model developed by Sir John Whitmore³. It provides a simple framework that can be applied by a manager:

Goals

The setting of goals is intrinsic to coaching: if you do not know where you are going, how will you know if you have achieved what you set out to? The coaching manager asks specific questions of the individual in order to ensure that the goal is in the best interests of the individual and those closest to him.

Reality

The individual needs to have a realistic grasp of where he is now, where he is starting from and whether his goal is a realistic one that can be achieved.

Options

The coaching manager guides the individual in thinking of a number of ways of achieving the goal(s) and the individual decides how he will pursue this. Although the manager needs to manage, and no-one wishes to deny the fact that there will be times when he has to direct an individual when using the coaching process, the manager does not aim to lead the individual but, rather, assist him in exploring possibilities so he can decide which option is best for him. The philosophical position is 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 individual will only achieve a goal if he is motivated to do so. Therefore the manager helps him to look at the possible obstacles he may encounter and how these can be overcome. In addition, the manager helps him consider whether there is a secondary gain to be had in 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 has in mind.

The GROW model works because it ensures that there is nothing that might prevent the individual 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 individual needs to change his current behaviour or acquire new skills in order to successfully obtain his desired goal(s).

Another model that is successfully used to hold the coaching process together is the Seven-

Stage Problem-Solving model. Some people 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. I use this model as a way of providing people with a structure that can be used for both professional and personal goal-setting.

A coaching approach fosters a more self-directed way of working

Table 1 below sets out the seven-step problem-solving sequence and accompanying questions that people can ask themselves at each step.

The micro-skills of coaching include helping the manager develop the skills and attitudes to help people manage situations from within their own resources. During this stage of the training, the individual is introduced to the concepts of empathy, respect and genuineness.

Empathy is the ability to put oneself in the shoes of the other person; this requires the manager to be able to tentatively explore the indi-

vidual'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 own ideas and feelings in a safe way.

Respect is the ability to refrain from judgment of the person as an individual, regardless of the manager's responses to that person's actions. If an individual fears being unfairly or less favourably judged, he may provide the information the manager wants to hear and not that which is actually relevant to the situation in question.

As a manager is involved in staff appraisal, this can prove a challenge for both the manager and the person managed. After all, the manager is making judgements about the individual's ability and the organisation expects him to do so. Indeed, he may be responsible for providing information that could directly influence an individual's promotion prospects and/or any bonuses that may be due.

For the manager to use effective coaching skills, he needs to be clear with the individual about the boundaries that exist between those occasions when he 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 required. 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 is 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 unlikely that any offers of assistance will be taken as genuine.

Skills training then goes on to include what has been termed

Steps	Questions/actions
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 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? Do I need to amend my action plan?

Table 1



‘active listening’, 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** (mirroring and matching the body language of the other person)
- **Paraphrasing content** (encapsulating the factual essence of what is being said and feeding this back)
- **Reflecting feeling** (catching the explicitly-expressed or inferred emotion. For example: “It sounds as if you were disappointed.”)
- **Summarising information** Asking for examples of how an individual has tried to deal with the situation
- **Open questions** (those starting with ‘what,’ ‘where,’ ‘when,’ ‘how’ and ‘why’ as a way of getting an

individual to expand on his situation, thoughts or emotions)

- **Minimal encouragers** (the use of simple terms such as ‘aha’ or ‘mmm’ to acknowledge that information has been understood without interrupting).

One aspect of successful coaching is ensuring that the goals set by the individual are clear and realistic. Managers can use the SMART model for goal-setting to achieve

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this. The concept of SMART goals is one used on various training courses to help individuals in their problem-solving efforts.

Specific

Ensuring that a goal is stated in specific terms (‘to ensure the achievements of the management team are known to all departments within the organisation’)

Measurable

Ensuring that goals can be measured (such information is made available, where and how)

Achievable

Checking to see that the goal can be achieved (can this goal be achieved in the time available or is the goal itself even achievable?)

Realistic

Is this goal within the person’s ability (is this subject something he

Case Study

Michael was the manager of 12 branches of a major IT high street retail company. He had recently taken up this appointment, having spent the previous seven years successfully managing five branches in the Midlands. His previous success had resulted in his recent promotion.

Michael 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 those areas that required attention – his leadership style and his lack of change-management skills. One of his goals was “to identify my leadership style together with its associated strengths and weaknesses”.

Using the GROW model, his manager helped Michael to understand that, while 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 Michael had received minimal training in the skills required for managing change. His manager suggested that he should contact the training department who, in turn, recommended a reading list that 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 was 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 Michael was now managing his team more effectively, less frequently. 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 Michael develop a new set of skills that benefited the organisation, his team and the profitability of the organisation.

knows about, can talk about and is within his professional scope, or does he need additional training)?

Time-bound

What time frame does the goal need to be achieved in (the date set to note and measure the change)?

Behavioural contracting is another way of achieving a clear set of measurable outcomes. A behavioural contract involves the

manager asking the coachee what general objectives he may be seeking and then breaking these down into a set of measurable outcomes. For example, an individual may be ‘task-’ rather than ‘person-’ orientated and this may be detrimental to his team. The individual may say he needs to “develop strategies for being more communicative”, which would be seen as an overall objective. However, this would then translate into a series

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of outcomes such as ‘identifying mechanisms to become more communicative’ and ‘devising strategies for clear communication’.

Both of these outcomes are measurable because the mechanism for identifying and implementing communication strategies can be observed by the individual himself as well as by others.

Summary

Coaching skills are now part of everyday corporate life and managers from all sectors are taking on the style of a ‘coaching manager’ for which appropriate training is given. A number of different training models to teach coaching skills exist, some of which are philosophically at odds with each other. However, they are all founded on ‘basic coaching skills’ that use the techniques of active listening within a structured framework. Managers trained in such skills have found them useful in dealing with the day-to-day issues of team management and in creating a more self-directed learning environment for staff. ■

References

1. Parsloe, E, (1999), *The Manager as Coach and Mentor*, CIPD, London, UK.
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3. Whitmore, J, (2002), 3rd edition, *Coaching for Performance – growing people, performance and purpose*, Nicholas Beasley Publishing, Boston, USA.

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