

how to:



Coach at work

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What is Coaching?

Coaching is a technique used to help another learn and as a result generate solutions for themselves. Coaching is underpinned by adult learning theory, life – stage developments and reflective practice.

Coaching is largely associated with one-to-one learning. However, it is different from training because it draws out rather than puts in. It aims at facilitating reflection and experimentation, leading to individual development; effective coaching supports personal change and growth for improved personal effectiveness. Coaching is about helping the individual to get the best out of themselves and enabling them to make decisions that will improve their performance.

How is it different from Counselling or Mentoring?

Counselling starts with an assumption that someone has a need or a problem. Some practice models used in counselling or therapy have been borrowed in coaching, but the core assumption is that the person is OK and just needs help for a short time to achieve their potential.

Mentoring is provided by an impartial party, often the further removed the better. The focus is on broader development of individual potential and career rather than achievement of a defined shorter term goal.

Coaching in the workplace

Whilst there are qualifications and professional bodies which support the work of expert or full-time coaches, coaching at work involves the use of techniques and skills which, on a day to day basis, help people learn and maximises their potential to succeed.

Coaching falls along a broad continuum (Hawkins and Smith 2006), with some approaches being best used to transfer or develop practical skills and others to develop the whole person. Skills and performance coaching are the most accessible and practical approaches for team leaders, line managers, supervisors at work.

There are generally two main aims to coaching at work:

Awareness - helping someone to become aware of what's going on within and around them so that their daily practice, behaviour and performance is enhanced.

Accountability - encouraging greater levels of personal responsibility for their engagements with people and environments in the workplace, thus enhancing understanding of the organisation.

Workplace coaching can happen within a single conversation or meeting. The interaction can be informal and ad hoc or a formal arrangement. It is the way the conversation is structured, where it focuses and how it empowers the individual that matters.

Do I need specific Skills or Tools?

To be effective as a coach it is important to have a structure or framework underpinning the intervention. There are a number of short courses and formal qualifications but the starting point for any coach is:

A framework or model

A coaching conversation is a meaningful encounter, or series of encounters. The CLEAR model (Hawkins) is helpful to ensure that the coaching process includes several stages which will maximise both outcomes and learning for the client.

CLEAR (Hawkins, 1979)

- Contracting
- Listening
- Exploring
- Action
- Review

A Point of Focus

Coaching is a solution-focused practice and so it is important to clarify and agree an aiming point such as a specific, time-limited goal or a desired outcome. The GROW model (Whitmore) is a helpful model to structure goal-orientated conversations. SMART objectives can also be used.

GROW (Whitmore, 1992)

- GOAL:** the desired outcome for the session
- REALITY:** the current situation, obstacles and context
- OPTIONS:** alternative strategies, and other possibilities that support achieving the goal
- WILLINGNESS:** the commitment & motivation to take the necessary or agreed actions

Basic skills required

Active listening:

Active listening is the most important skill of a coach and can be broadly considered as having two elements, non-verbal (nodding, eye contact, posture with mirroring) and verbal. The latter includes small verbal comments such as “yes”, paraphrasing, summarizing and asking for clarification such as . . . “what you seem to be saying is . . . is that right?” Clean language approaches (e.g. Sullivan and Rees 2008) prompt the coach to listen to and use the language the individual is using, to build deeper understanding of their perspective on issues.

Incisive questioning:

Questions in a coaching encounter aim to get below the surface of an issue and prompt someone to slow down their thinking and reflect. It is the process of reflection, guided by non-directive questions, which opens up new perspectives in a person's thinking and allows them to discover and explore new ideas and solutions.

Common Coaching Questions

- ▶ What are you doing now?
- ▶ What could you do differently?
- ▶ When might you do it?
- ▶ How could you sabotage yourself?
- ▶ What support do you need?
- ▶ How will you know or how will we know you're making progress?
- ▶ What would happen if you don't change your . . . ?
- ▶ How committed are you to this change?
- ▶ What do you need to do in order to increase this commitment?

10 Steps to get started with a coachee at work

1. Clarify and understand what the coachee wants to achieve
2. Create a 'contract' - this is key to ensure a common focus during the session(s)
3. Actively listen to understand their reality
4. Ask probing questions and avoid providing answers
5. Refrain from being overly critical or judgmental
6. Explore the alternative options or possible solutions to their situation
7. Prioritise & agree action(s) that have the best chance of achieving the desired outcome
8. Let the coachee summarise the way forward
9. Agree how and when the plan will be monitored/ evaluated
10. Celebrate the achievements and successes along the way

What's in it for me?

The skills of coaching can be used on a day to day basis by educators in all contexts. The roles of undergraduate tutor or post graduate educational supervisor can be enhanced by developing coaching skills. The coaching frameworks used can have powerful results for the person being coached and fosters in the coach a capability to influence positive change. Coaches learn deeply and enjoy the experience of being change agents both at work and in many other situations in their lives.

Further Information

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Oxford Brookes University, *International Journal of Evidence based Coaching and Mentoring*. Online, peer reviewed journal Oxford Brookes University <http://ijebcm.brookes.ac.uk/>

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