

# 14 Coaching Principles All Managers Should Practice

“Coaching is the universal language of change and learning.”  
- CNN

I want to preface that this article will not be touching on the industry itself, what makes an excellent coach, who can actually call themselves coaches or the effectiveness of working with a coach. Although these are all valid and important topics, I decided with this piece to keep it directly around the application of coaching and key principles all managers and people leaders should understand and be able to demonstrate when looking to develop someone on their team. In order to do that, I believe it's important to first understand what coaching is and what coaching is not.

## **Background:**

Coaching differs from other types of counseling methods. Even though it can be sometimes confused with therapy, training or mentoring – coaching is a unique proposition which can very often combine: a career counseling, management counseling, mentoring, psychology, positive thinking, leadership training program, consulting and other similar trainings. It takes ideas and inspiration from these areas and implies them to help people in reaching for their excellence and achieving their visions.

## **Coaching is not Training**

*While training and coaching both promote learning, they do so in different ways:*

- Training is about teaching specific skills or knowledge – Coaching is about facilitating someone else's thinking and helping them learn on the job.
- Training usually takes place off-site or in dedicated classes – Coaching takes place in the office and (when carried out by a manager) can be integrated into day-to-day workplace conversations or over the phone.
- Training is more typically carried out in groups – Coaching is usually a one-to-one process, tailored to the individual's needs.
- Training is usually delivered by an external consultant or dedicated internal trainer – Coaching can be delivered by an external consultant or by a manager.

## **Coaching is not Mentoring:**

*In comparison to a coach a mentor is typically a master or SME within the field of their knowledge.*

- Mentor advises, basing their advice on a gained personal experience, while a coach does not necessarily have to reach for their experience in the specific field in order to

effectively support the client in achieving their goals.

- Mentoring allows the learner to own both the goals and the process and model their behaviors on given examples and experience of his mentor. In coaching, the learner has primary ownership of the goal but the coach has primary ownership of the process.

### Coaching is **not Therapy**:

*A lot of people associate (life) coaching with therapy but the truth is, coaching is not targeted to help people with their psychological problems and in fact, trained coaches whom have gone through an accredited certified coaching program will have been taught how to spot this. For most people whom haven't had this type of training, some of the signs could be (fill in).*

- Therapy focuses primarily on the past and can be rooted in managing and coping where coaching is focused to improve the development path of the person taking the current situation as an initial point. It's forward based and rooted in empowerment, exploration and possible specific solutions.
- Therapy raises the question why? While coaching focuses on the present and builds the future, asking more what? and how? questions. It focuses on solutions and actions by which a client seeks to achieve results, rather than looking for causes of his failures.

### So **what is Coaching?**

- Coaching a useful way of developing people's skills and abilities, and of boosting performance. It can also help deal with issues and challenges before they become major problems. A coaching session will typically take place as a conversation between the coach and the coachee (person being coached), and it focuses on helping that individual discover answers for themselves regarding a current or future challenge or goal. The fact is, people are much more likely to engage with solutions that they have come up with themselves, rather than those that are forced upon them by their manager or leader.
- In some organizations, coaching is still seen as a corrective tool, used only when things have gone wrong. But in many companies, coaching is considered to be a positive and proven approach for helping others explore their goals and ambitions, and then achieve them. Managers and leaders in today's organizations are being asked to do more coaching but the data points to the fact that most managers and people leaders are simply not equipped with the skills necessary to effectively coach and support their people. Typically, managers meet their coaching obligations by giving performance reviews, holding occasional meetings and offering advice (which you now know is not coaching).

A manager can be just as effective as externally hired coaches. Managers don't have to be trained formally as coaches as long as they stay within the scope of their skill set, and maintain a structured approach, they can add value, and help develop their people's skills and abilities as long as they understand what they are creating.

**Follow these 14 core principles to ensure you are effectively laying the groundwork to coach your people successfully.**

- **Future State Thinking**

Be clear in your own mind about what you want the other person to accomplish. If you are their manager, this will typically be an easier process. . Focus on what the end result should look like more than how you think they "might" be able to get there. Think about the big picture and how their success will impact both the broader companies objectives as well as their personal developmental goals and/or desires. When you are clear, you're more likely to get buy-in.

- **Build Trust**

The foundation of every relationship, regardless of its nature is trust. It's critical that you are able to establish an atmosphere of open communication and mutual respect. A coaches ability to be successful is predicated on how much and how quickly they can build this foundation. The foundation of any coaching relationship is rooted in the manager's day-to-day relationship with the employee. Without some degree of trust, conducting an effective coaching meeting is impossible. Your employees need to develop trust that you are here to help them succeed and not gather information that can be used against them.

- **Powerful Listening**

One of the greatest skills a coach/manager must practice is active listening. Fully deploy listening skills with an open mind in order to ask more effective questions of the employee/individual, and get to the heart of an issue to assist them in finding a solution.

- **Getting Agreement**

As a manager, getting your employees to agree that there is a performance issue can sometimes be an uphill battle. Overlooking or avoiding the performance issue because you assume the employee understands its significance is a typical mistake of managers. To get an employee to acknowledge a performance issue exists, you must be able to define the nature of the issue and get the employee to recognize the consequences of not changing their behavior. To do this, you must specify the behavior and clarify the consequences. Be careful not to assume that your understanding of the situation is the right one. A coaching session is a two-way communication process. You should encourage your employees to explain how they interpret the behaviors and agree on the nature of the issue.

- **Be Curious**

Rather than just jumping in to problem-solving mode and rescuing every person in site, first get curious about what may be causing the problem. This helps define the problem more clearly. Some questions to ask the person you are coaching:

- What do you think is really causing this situation?
- What's holding you back from the goal?
- What is it about this situation that is keeping you up at night?
- In what ways are you not being the person you'd like to be now?

To have successful coaching relationships with anyone (especially your employees), you really need to get to know them on at least some personal level. Let me stress, this is not

about being friends or socializing outside of the office. Knowing a little bit about the person you are supporting can offer you valuable insight into the "why" they do what they do. Thinking about thinking is an important part of the coaching process so remember to ask open-ended questions.

- **Be Flexible**

Remember that each person has different motivators and communication styles. Recognize and understand that each person may have a different style of learning and respond differently to how you communicate. If someone is slower to speak and respond, for example, allow them time to think and process rather than interrupting with 'helpful' suggestions. Effective coaching adapts to the unique style and needs of the person being coached. This is typically a learning gap for the coach who wants to jump in, create results for their employee and get back some valuable time in their day - especially when they see the issue (hopefully) from a distance with no bias or judgement. Flexible doesn't mean being a push over or getting someone to like you. It simply means you are being and doing what's needed with this individual to ensure they are moving closer to their goals while maintaining the proper level of trust, commitment, action and integrity required to move the coaching partnership forward.

- **Have and Set Goals**

Discuss what you want to accomplish and be clear about your expectations. Consider giving your employees a model of what their end goal looks like or set specific criteria for what the output should include. Coaching is focused and grounded in a future state of what's possible however this is only achievable with a clear timeline. Setting milestones that build toward the end goal with prescheduled "check-in meetings" will allow you to get together along the way in order to evaluate how things are going. Talk about a deadline and indicate how important the timing may (or may not) be to the success of the project or performance gap. Personally using the S.M.A.R.T Goal framework is a great starting point for both the conversation as well as to ensure it's achievable.

- **Provide Feedback**

As your employees work toward accomplishing the goal you set together, be sure to attend your check-in meetings at the agreed upon times. This applies to both the process but equally important is when they reach their milestones and ultimately their end goal. Allow them to ask questions. Acknowledge them for what's going right with the project and make suggestions if you feel they need more direction. Remember to Be Curious, Be Present and Listen and Revisit the agreed upon End Goals.

- **Alignment With Your Company's Core Values**

When possible, your coaching should be based on your organization's core values (or the employee/individual you are coaching). This becomes the "why" behind your support and coaching actions. As a result, your coaching becomes less about what you think and reinforces the culture that you want in your organization. And when you and your employees are looking at the bigger picture together, it should help them be more receptive to you, understand how this impacts both the broader organization and ultimately their individual goals and aspirations. Managers who know the business case for coaching and developing others typically value the process and use it more

effectively.

- **Collaboration Is Key**

No matter the situation, coaching conversations should flow both ways with ample opportunity for mutual feedback and discussion. This way, you're not removing your employees' responsibility in the matter or doing the work for them. When you establish great coaching relationships with your employees, it can improve every interaction you have with them and makes management far easier. Remember, a coach is not the expert but rather a sounding board who can and should reflect back to their people what they see and hear (but not "feel") regarding their performance as it relates to that important end goal.

- **Explore All Possible Solutions**

With the help of your employee, brainstorm alternative solutions and possibilities to the issue. Your role is to ensure that your employees come up with specific alternatives to the existing challenges and not create broad or vague solutions. The reason is that you need to hold them accountable to the solutions and clearly define what your expectations of the performance are. Your focus is to help them set goals (i.e.: SMART) and support them in coming up with specific alternatives to create the highest possibility of success for reaching them. You can provide your own ideas, but be aware that they will carry more weight simply because it's coming from you.

- **Commitment To Act**

Different than getting agreement, the commitment here is around taking action and ensuring that they see what's possible in it for them by taking action. It does not matter how great of a solution or roadmap to get you their is. If your employee doesn't see it, get it or possibly feel it - then you should pause and recalibrate. You don't want a false start. This also works for you the coach. Outlining what they (your employee or individual) can expect from you in terms of showing up, supporting them, keeping and scheduling meeting times and most importantly ask them if there is anything specific they need from you - will demonstrate the level of integrity you are seeking them to model as well.

- **Handle excuses**

Employees may use excuses to lower your expectations of their performance or simply shy away from what they don't know or feel is outside their comfort zone. You should acknowledge them without giving them agreement while focusing on the solutions and the SMART Goal. There may be situational factors that may affect the outcome of their performance and as a coach, you need to take them into consideration so by all means keep an open mind. Remember to get curious and do some detective work around both the content and context to what they are sharing. The content will be the story and where the excuses come from but the context (i.e.: emotional state) is where a coach can pick up the subtle cues and clues as to why they are hesitant to move forward or commit.

- **Accountability**

Probably the most important aspect of both what coaching provides as well as what is needed to ensure a successful coaching experience for everyone involved. Your job is to

ensure that your employee understand what you should do if they do not follow through on their commitments. You could ask, “How would you like me to follow up if I don’t hear back from you?” or “If you don’t follow through, how should I help you get back on track?” And then, be sure that you follow through. If you don’t model accountability, it sends the wrong message and jeopardizes future coaching solutions as well as taints your employee's listening of you which will prevent further engagement on their end. I am putting Time Management under this section as it pertains to being, staying and holding others to being accountable. Remember that coaching can happen in different ways with different needs and circumstances. There may be times where spot coaching sessions are needed or a session may run require more time than allotted. Plan your coaching times, know when they are and ensure that your employee / individual also knows. Send calendar invites as well as follow ups if needed. In the event you cannot make a session, immediately reach out to that employee, communicate the need to reschedule and find a new time as quickly as possible. This will again model both being accountable as well as being in integrity with your words, actions and ultimately the support you have for that person.

**This is not a model nor a specific framework outlined in order. The best way to use this information is to apply it during any coaching engagement as a personal checklist both preflight and during.** The reason is quite simple: many trained coaches and/or managers will complete some type of training program and learn to apply that methodology with their people and within their practice, function and company. In addition, there are hundreds of other coaching models that currently exist. Some are more radical and effective while others are redundant. Your goal is to discover what works best for you AND your people and apply it so that THEY improve. There is no one single coaching model that will work with everyone - everytime but you should explore what's out there. In fact, I would invite you to use these principles in conjunction of your own personality, style and of course any learnings or models you feel works for you, your people and most importantly your companies culture.

### **Final Thoughts:**

A manager who sees people's potential is far better at coaching them towards it. A manager that judges people based on past and current performance, or believes that people are inherently limited, will not make a strong effort to engage staff for optimal performance. An engaged, well-coached employee will out-perform one who is being mismanaged by a weak boss.

**If you manage people, you should understand the importance of effective coaching. How someone is managed can have an enormous impact on their effectiveness and productivity, and thus impact the productivity of the entire team.**

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