



Coaching can be the responsibility of a designated expert, but it can also be an aspect of the role of manager. The coaching role itself can be a case of wearing multiple hats: including those of trainer, mentor and consultant. The coaching function includes the following generic tasks.

1. Increasing the self-awareness of the individual

This usually takes on the form of enhancing the coachee's awareness of their strengths, weaknesses, cognitive and learning styles, ways of relating to others, motivation for work, values and long-term objectives. The coach must be able to evaluate how much self-knowledge and awareness an individual is capable of, in the context of the tasks the coachee has. The coach must find opportunities for the coachee to develop their self-awareness, by exploring workplace issues from different perspectives and observing patterns in the coachee's behaviour.

2. Diagnosing the core of the issue

Coaches and coachees have to develop hypotheses about the reasons for workplace issues, and then test those hypotheses. The coach needs to be open to the response of the coachee. Because coaching is a partnership, if the coach is unsure of the core issue the coachee will probably be able to add clarity. The coach and coachee as partners can then make a list of "root causes" or sources of problematical issues. Often the issues that present first are not the core issue but one of a number of symptoms welling from the same source. Much learning is taking place through this process of elimination and provided the coach remains aware and does not succumb to anxiety or time pressure, either from self, coachee or the organisation then the core issues will surface!

3. Excellent communication skills

Active listening with empathetic responding, clear logic and clear talking are critical skills for the coach. The coachee will model the coach in many ways – particularly in how the coach deals, or doesn't deal, with conflict. How open, sincere, humorous and assertive the coach is in the coaching dialogue will set the parameters for ongoing communication between the two parties. Indeed, without this, the coach will fail to get to the core issues of the coachee. Equally important is the degree of trust, collaboration and commitment exhibited by both the coach and coachee. It is a true partnership. Last but not least, the way the coach deals with cross-cultural issues and diversity impacts well beyond the coaching relationship.

4. Learning new techniques

With coaching, the emphasis is on the coachee finding the answers themselves. Nevertheless, coaches should not be reluctant to teach. This is a delicate and sensitive position for the coach – teach new techniques, for example, of action planning and monitoring outcomes – but do not slip into the comfort zone of directing the coachee. The teaching aspect of the coaching function includes methods of problem-solving, models of change, coaching models, models of challenging self-limiting beliefs and regulating negative emotions as well as more effective methods of action planning and goal setting. When the coach has exhausted the coachee's inner resources after prolonged questioning, then if the Coach has relevant and useful information it should be given freely so as not to frustrate the learning of the coachee.

5. Targeting and evaluating behaviours to be changed

Specific behaviours have to be targeted and evaluated if they are to be either strengthened or decreased. Choose behaviour or behaviours that yield a baseline measure (perhaps via a 360-degree instrument) and are able to be changed and that are able to be measured.

6. Constant practice and rehearsal

New skills and ways of behaving take consistent reinforcement. They require rehearsal, role-play and ongoing practice until they become automatic. The coach must ensure that these new behaviours, language, actions etc are practised until they become internalised and integrated. The coachee becomes *unconsciously competent* – they do not have to think about how to act, they do it naturally.

7. Giving feedback

One of the central tasks of coaching is the giving of feedback. How this feedback is delivered is an important interchange because it is an interchange that will be modelled by the coachee in their interactions with others. The coachee may have been in a vulnerable and receptive state when they received the feedback; thus the probability of it being mimicked is enhanced. It is important to prepare coachees for feedback and to allow for initial defensiveness. Acknowledging and leveraging coachee's strengths to work on revealed "gaps" contributes to delivering feedback constructively and with minimal harm to the relationship.

8. Keeping the coachee focused and accountable

Being focused and on track is part of any coaching exercise. Being persuasive is part of the coach's role but it should occur in the context of exploration of what the coachee really wants and what is getting in the way of moving forward.

Remedial coaching for performance improvement

It is generally (although not always) cheaper for a company to "salvage than sever" an under-performing employee. The reasons for the perceived under-performance may be many, varied and sometimes very complex and subtle and, indeed, may have more to do with the workplace environment and the company than the employee.

The direct and indirect costs of terminating and replacing an employee in a competitive marketplace can be counted in many months of their salary and remediation is worthy of

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consideration before committing to termination. There is also the effect of an employee's termination on the morale of other employees to be considered.

Organisations should also consider all the effects of allowing a dysfunctional situation to persist or terminating the employee abruptly:

- the progress of the business will stagnate or stall
- the organisation's competitors may take advantage of the situation
- the employee may make a unfair or wrongful dismissal claim – even if the claim is unsuccessful, it can be time-consuming and costly
- proprietary knowledge and commercial advantage are at risk
- the organisation will be liable for the recruitment and induction costs for a new employee.

Employees, even at the executive level, are generally hired for their perceived functional competence and expertise, yet termination is more likely to come about from a perceived lack of "softer skills". Remedial coaching will often improve the latter.

Areas where coaching is not appropriate

Coaching does not suit all circumstances, not does a particular style or method of coaching fit all occasions. The needs of every situation are unique. The challenge for the coach is to understand this and be prepared to adapt to the situation as it emerges. Breakthroughs come at different stages for different people.

But there are also situations where a coaching intervention is inappropriate, or even dangerous. These situations are where:

- the person has a psychological issue (eg a personality disorder) that is more appropriate for a psychologist, psychiatrist or psychotherapist to deal with
- the person needs counselling rather than coaching, on issues that are more related to their personal situation than work.

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