



The Coaching Manager - 11

Blocks and Barriers

In this issue of The Coaching Manager I am going to look at the issue of blocks or barriers to coaching and how you can potentially overcome them.

A block or a barrier to coaching is simply what it implies; it is something that occurs to prevent coaching happening in the first place. There are a number of blocks, which I will outline, and I will also outline ways, which you as a manager can overcome them.

1. The Organisation and Senior Management:

It may well be that the organisation that you work in has a very "command and control" culture where the "boss is king" and what he or she says goes. There can be great pressures on managers who want to coach and to take the time to coach as senior managers want things done now and want things done in the way that they themselves would do them. To be seen to be different can be taken the wrong way, so managers who want to coach must be strong enough to manage "up the way" in that senior management is aware of what your doing and why. You will have to get your best "influencing or selling hat" on to ensure that you minimise their insecurities and that you will still be responsible for the results. Persuade them, that by taking the coaching approach you will increase results and productivity. Most people who operate under a "command and control" culture do so because of fear and insecurity. This applies to both those "shouting the orders" and those having to take them. Stand up for yourself, guarantee results, and keep senior management informed of progress highlighting increased productivity, increased morale, increased capability, and ensure that you link it to your coaching methods.

2. Your Management Peers.

Most of the managers I have worked with over the years have attempted to build their coaching capability. Some, however, have not for a variety of reasons. These reasons are numerous but they all link to basic fear and insecurity.

Fear of authority – Scared that the boss will not agree. "I must follow the boss"

Fear of the skills of coaching – "I might not be able to do it, and how then will it look to the boss and my reports?"

Fear of having something else to do – "I can't fit it in to my daily schedule because my time management is very poor"

Fear of their reports – "I am not able to influence them to accepting my change of behaviour and approach"

Fear of risk – “Results are OK, why jeopardise them?”

Fear of being upstaged by you – “I am seen as having a good competency rating and this manager introducing coaching may endanger that”

Fear of being seen to be “weak” – “As a manager I have to be strong and to have to listen and let people make their own decisions is a sign of weakness. As the boss I have to be seen to make the decisions for people.”

Quite frightening isn't it? And I'm sure there are numerous other fears and insecurities. In order for your peers to accept coaching you will have to minimise these fears. Keep them informed about what you are doing and why. It is not to upstage them. It is to enable people to improve their capabilities and their performance so the organisation becomes profitable and employees get better deals from the employer. If you have the backing of senior management, then all the better. If you don't you will have to watch out for the odd manager who will want you to fail because they would want the status quo to remain. Get as many fellow managers on your side as possible. The best way though is to link your coaching approach to the results that you gain.

I have been accused in the past by some individuals, as being a “weak” manager because I have taken what I call a “people centred approach”. Yes, as a manager I had my development areas, particularly in monitoring and budgeting, but I could never describe myself as weak just because I listened to and attempted to understand what was going on with the people in my team. I could be “tough” when it was appropriate or deserved and I have had the displeasure of putting people on disciplinaries and of terminating contracts. I had no qualms about doing this, but only did this after reasons for under-performance were understood and that supportive measures to help people improve were not acted upon by the individual. Coaching is not a weakness, it is a strength.

3. Individuals in the Team – the Coachees.

The biggest block to coachees accepting coaching is trust. There are other blocks; a perception that coaching is therapy or counselling; that getting coaching means that one is in need of “correction”; a fear that coaching will “bring things to the surface” and I'm sure there are others.

Coachees have to fully understand what coaching is and isn't and this should be the first task of any manager who starts to coach and to use the word “coach”. Explain to the coachee specifically what coaching is and what it entails. Engage their hearts and minds to the fact that coaching is about action and success. You will get a few sceptics but once you demonstrate the skills and maintain the contract you put in place, trust will grow and even the most “difficult” coachee can be brought round to the benefits.

In summary regardless of where the blocks lie, whether it be at senior level or peer or coachee level, use your coaching skills to explain what coaching specifically is, how and when it happens, and what results can be gained from taking a coaching approach. Demonstrate your skills, maintain the agreed contract, and all the while ensure that the results gained are linked back to the coaching interventions. When people realise that coaching is a strength and not a weakness or a threat they will “buy in”.