



## The Coaching Manager - 9

### The Skill / Will Matrix – Using the appropriate Coaching approach.

In my early days as a manager, I was often surprised by the reaction I got when I either delegated a task or simply told someone what to do. The result was either the fact that the task was not completed or was done in an incorrect manner. It was only until I spoke to people about the reasons as to why it was not done or why it was completed incorrectly that I started to ask questions around what I should have done. Then I was introduced to Blanchard's Situational Leadership model or The Skill/Will Matrix and it all started to make sense to me.

I was delegating tasks inappropriately in that I was delegating the task to someone who was unwilling ... or unable ... to complete the job, and I then remained relatively 'hands-off' or uninvolved. Alternatively, I may have been 'hands-on' or directive with a capable person who was quite able to complete the assignment with little assistance from me; I just ended up frustrating them.

I also remember when I was being "coached" by a senior manager in a task that was new to me. They asked me all sorts of questions in order for me to come up with the answers and I became incredibly frustrated as I couldn't find the answers at all and what I really needed was for them to tell me the answers so as I could at least get started on the task! Ever been there? Annoying isn't it!

Consequently, whether you are 'coaching' or just 'managing', it is critical to match your style of coaching interaction with the coachee's readiness for the task.

The Skill/Will Matrix will enable you to do this.

#### Skill / Will Matrix

The model is divided into four quadrants:

1. **LOW SKILL / LOW WILL** – The beginner to a role, project or task who is just starting out and is nervous or may have already tried and failed.
2. **HIGH WILL / LOW SKILL** – The enthusiastic beginner new to a particular role, project or task.
3. **LOW WILL / HIGH SKILL** – The skilled experienced person who is in need of attention of some description and may be being affected by the challenge of change.

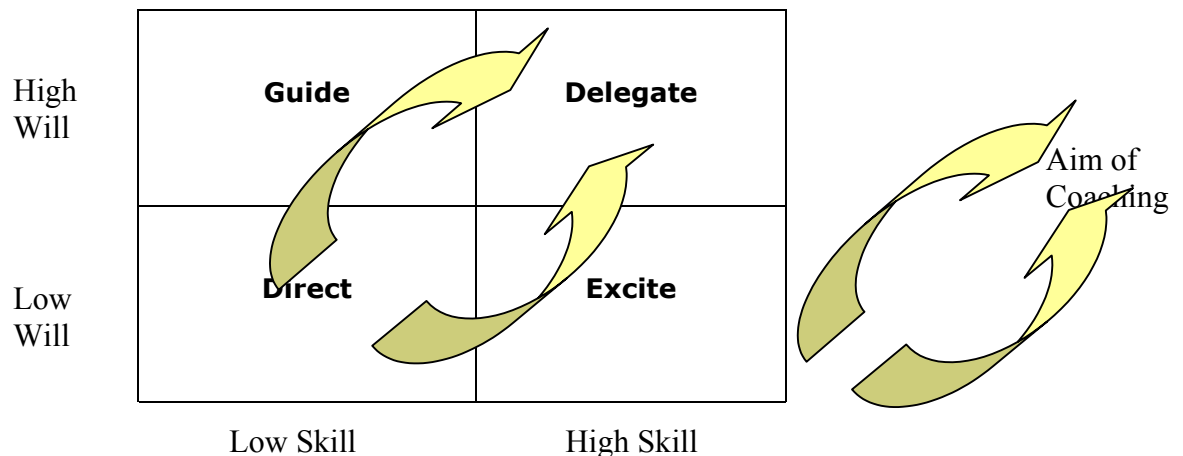
4. **HIGH SKILL / HIGH WILL** – The skilled worker who is looking for more opportunities to grow and develop.

### How do you use this model?

Step 1: Diagnose whether the coachee's skill and will are high or low, for the specific task to be accomplished. Remember that it is related to the specific task and not to overall experience. You may have someone who you think is High Will / High Skill overall because of their performances, but where are they on the matrix if you give them a new task where their capabilities may not be evident?

- **Skill** depends on experience, training, understanding, role perception
- **Will** depends on desire to achieve, incentives, security, confidence

Step 2: Identify the appropriate coaching/management style – e.g., use 'Guide' if the coachee has high will but low skill for the task:



Step 3: Agree your intended approach with your coachee.

### Applying the Skill/Will Matrix

**Direct** (skill and will are both low)

- First build the will / motivation
  - Provide clear and concise briefings
  - Identify motivators and de-motivators
  - Develop a vision of future performance
  - Ensure understanding of requirements

- Then build the skill
  - Structure tasks for 'quick wins'
  - Identify training requirements.
  - coach and train
- Then sustain the will
  - Provide frequent feedback against progress
  - Praise and nurture
- **Ensure close supervision with clear rules and deadlines.**

**Guide** (low skill, high will)

- Invest time early on to ensure inclusion and understand training requirements
  - Coach and Train
  - Answer questions/explain
- Create a risk-free environment to allow early 'mistakes/learning'
- Monitor progress regularly and ensure feedback and praise
- Relax control as progress is shown

**Excite** (high skill, low will)

- Identify reasons for low will – e.g., task/management style/personal factors
- Motivate appropriately
- Monitor, feed back
- Ensure scope for regular progress checks.

**Delegate** (skill and will are both high)

- Provide freedom to do the job
  - Set objectives, not method
  - Praise, don't ignore
- Encourage coachee to take responsibility
  - Involve in decision-making
  - Use 'You tell me what *you* think'
- Take appropriate risks
  - Give more challenging tasks ensuring support in place.
  - Don't over-manage

Applying the skill/will matrix principles will enable you to ensure that you are taking the appropriate approach with each individual in the team when you are asking them to perform tasks.

References: The Tao of Coaching – Max Landsberg  
Ken Blanchard – Situational Leadership Model.