



The Coaching Manager – 2

Coaching Requisites and Pre-Suppositions:

Those of you that received the first issue of The Coaching Manager will by now, if you had followed the suggested actions, be more aware of what coaching is and how it fits in with the other managerial skills that a manager must possess in order to be successful.

“So, okay, I have the theory, but what do I have to do to put it into practice?” is a question you may be asking.

Firstly, before you even attempt to coach, what beliefs and presuppositions do you think an effective coach has to have?

Good, effective coaches presuppose and believe the following:

- Everyone lives in their own unique model or map of the world and people always make the best choice available to them, given their map and their perception of the situation.
- People cannot not respond, therefore everything you say and do influences.
- The meaning of a communication is the response it elicits. The intention behind a communication is not necessarily the same as it’s meaning.
- All behaviour is motivated by a positive intention.
- There is no such thing as failure only feedback and the chance to learn from mistakes.
- The person with the most behavioural flexibility in an interaction will have the greatest likelihood of achieving their outcome.
- Everyone already has all the resources (personal qualities) required to take the next step towards achieving their outcome.

In addition, there are some coaches who also believe the following:

- A leader cannot lead without a following.
- The autocratic, power-based, boss faces extinction.
- The manager is there as a support, not as a threat.

As you look at some of these beliefs, what are your own? My experience when I have discussed them with managers has been mixed with some wholeheartedly agreeing that they have similar beliefs and some who are not convinced at all! The main beliefs that cause the most debate are:

“All behaviour is motivated by a positive intention”

“There is no such thing as failure, only feedback”

“Everyone already has all the resources (personal qualities) required to take the next steps towards achieving their outcome.”

Some managers make judgements on their staff, with a lot of these judgements based on very little fact at all. "She is useless"; "He is lazy", "They are not team players". There are many more, and what is particularly confusing is that these comments are usually made about people who have been recruited by the manager making the comments!

By having the positive beliefs outlined earlier as opposed to negative judgments then the manager is in a much better position to coach effectively. If a particular employee is not performing as well as should be expected, then the manager should look closely at what is causing the underperformance before making quick judgements about what the employee is or is not doing.

Beliefs are important as they play such a vital role in how a manager chooses to operate in their role. A manager who believes that people cannot be trusted will never coach (or manage!) effectively until he or she shifts that belief round to one, which is more people-orientated.

Have a think about what you really believe about people. Are people to be trusted? Do you believe that your reports are there just to do as you say? Are your beliefs different outside of work? Why are they different? What is happening within work that causes you to exhibit supposedly different beliefs?

Working at a beliefs/values level is vital if effective coaching is to happen. The manager must be aware of his own beliefs and values and also must be prepared to share them with his peers and employees. How prepared are you to share?

Probably the greatest quality a manager can have is the quality of AWARENESS. This is the product of focused attention, concentration and clarity. While awareness includes both seeing and hearing, it is more than that. Awareness also takes into account feelings, the gathering of relevant facts and the ability to determine what is relevant. There will also be a good understanding of systems, team dynamics, relationships, and some psychology. The ability to be self-aware of one's own strengths and weaknesses is also awareness.

Again, having worked with a good number of managers over the years, the degree of awareness that each possessed varied considerably. Whilst many were self-aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, the area of awareness that needed most attention was their understanding of how people and teams operated. Their knowledge of models and systems was very limited and as such "dampened" their awareness and thus lessened their ability to coach effectively. How is your awareness? How would you rate your knowledge of team dynamics, team development models, and personality styles?

A key concept or goal of coaching is RESPONSIBILITY. Coaches have to ensure that the coachee takes on responsibility for the actions that they are accountable for. Telling does not produce responsibility and hence good managers will coach their employees in such a way that the employee "chooses" the best way to do a particular task. We will look at how coaching managers can achieve this in a later issue.

The Qualities of an Effective Coach:

- Aware
- Self-aware
- Excellent Listener
- Patient
- Detached
- Supportive
- Interested

- Perceptive
- Attentive
- Retentive
- Able to challenge assumptions and actions
- Able to give and receive feedback.

How do you rate on each of these qualities? What areas do you have to work on? You might want to get some feedback from some of your colleagues to help raise your own awareness!

From my own experience, I've worked with and met a few managers who don't rate very highly on any of the qualities. They do not listen effectively and have low patience thresholds. They cannot remain detached as they "know" the "answers" and as such cannot support the employees concerns and ideas. They aren't interested as they have "other things to do" and their perception of what is actually happened is not very high as their minds are on "other things". Some managers have the capability to be good coaches but their lack of time and personal management don't allow them to be as "other things" get in the road of them taking time to meet with their people. Other managers just do not have the correct people skills to be effective coaches, and some managers do not have the correct beliefs about people to coach successfully.

Am I painting a pretty poor picture of management? I do believe that there is scope for great improvement in how managers operate and coach. I also believe that every manager has the potential to become a great coach within their management role provided they stop to reflect, get feedback from peers, and start to build their awareness around their strengths and weaknesses. With the resultant feedback they should be able to build a personal development plan that will help to build their capabilities. Once the manager realises that good coaching can bring more productivity for his subordinates and ultimately for him or herself, they will very rarely return to their old ways – unless stress gets to them! More about stress and it's impact in a later issue.

The challenge for all managers is to ensure that they become aware! A good coach will support them to do that. Does your organisation have people who can coach effectively so as to raise individuals' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses? If not, act quickly!

In summary, check your beliefs about people then compare them with the attitudes and beliefs of a good coach. Look at your own strengths and weaknesses and raise your awareness and your responsibility. Build a personal development plan, particularly in the area of coaching.