



The Coaching Manager - 3

Contracting:

In this chapter I will discuss the importance of contracting in coaching and I will also look at how one ensures that time is put aside in order for coaching to happen effectively. Contracting is an essential skill not only for specialist coaches but also for all roles and in particular for the manager who has to deal with not only his or her direct reports but also the people the manager reports to. I used to contract badly, if at all, and as a result, my ability to manage expectations and influence people suffered! Big Time!

So, what is contracting?

Contracting is essentially ensuring that all "interested" parties know what is specifically happening between individuals and what it potentially means for them as an individual. Contracting is essential if trust is to be built between coach and coachee, and it is extremely important, I believe, for specialised coaches working either internally in organisations or as external "freelance" coaches. The manager who coaches does not have to contract their coaching with his or her reports as fully as perhaps a specialist coach would, as a contract (or "way of working") should have been discussed covering all aspects of the manager's role. How routinely does this happen? Not a lot!

Let me give a couple of examples of contracting:

1. A new manager meeting with one of their reports for the first time. An informal contract covering their working together could cover questions like:
 - a. What motivates and demotivates each other?
 - b. What expectations of the manager does the report have and vice-versa.
 - c. What are the strengths and development areas of both the manager and the report?
 - d. How often and in what setting will review meetings have?
 - e. What structure does a regular review meeting have?
2. A specialist coach's contracting discussion will cover the following with reference to coaching:
 - a. How a Coaching session is structured e.g. telephone or face to face or e-mail?
 - b. The timing of coaching sessions i.e. frequency and duration.
 - c. The style of the coach.
 - d. Confidentiality discussion. What is and isn't.
 - e. Feedback in relation to when coaching is and is not being effective.

You will notice that there are differences in the "level" to which contracting happens between manager and specialist coach. Why is this?

The first contract between manager and report seems to be fairly superficial in that it discusses how report and manager want to work together. The coach's contract is also aimed at how best they are going to work with the client but also builds in confidentiality and trust which will lead to potentially greater openness and honesty between the two.

My belief is that managers if they are successful in building an initial contract between themselves and the report, can then build a closer more trusting informal contract. As regards a specific contract for managers to coach then I believe that does not have to take place, as you would potentially have to contract all functions of management!

Contracting builds trust and for managers it should cover how best a manager and his or her report work together. For specialised coaches, a contract covering not only ways of working together, but also covering specific aspects of coaching and confidentiality is a must.

I must point out here that the confidentiality aspect of contracting can be incredibly stressful for internal company coaches in particular, but also for managers. Often senior managers will want to know details of how a particular employee is doing and in some cases the coach (and manager) may be asked (or told) to release details of conversations. The coach or manager can then become a "pig in the middle" risking breaking the contract with the report and also risking the wrath of the senior manager by what he or she might see as "withholding information". This is where being able to manage or influence "upwards" is vital and this is another example of where contracting is so very important.

Contracting is about managing people's expectations whether they are a new recruit or whether they are the chief executive.

So, as a manager, you have contracted with your report in terms of how best you are going to work together, and you may have included within that discussion, details of how you would like to use the skill of coaching to help the report develop and be successful. Within management I believe that coaching can happen in two main ways:

1. Performance Coaching "on the job". E.g. observing a sales representative and then reviewing how the sales call went afterwards. Coaching here would support the sales rep to identify what went well and not so well. What were the reasons for it going well or not so well? How were they feeling in before, during and after the call? What did they notice about their customer? If they were to do it again, now, what would they do differently? Etc, etc.
2. Dedicated Time Coaching. Here coaching takes place within a certain time frame (e.g. 1 hour) and specific topics are identified and discussed. e.g. How best can I build my development plan? I'm struggling with Objective Number 2. How can I get back on track? How can I influence that major customer to buy my products? Etc etc.

In discussions with managers, a lot of good performance coaching happens while "on the job". In terms of Dedicated Time Coaching most managers I have dealt with agree that it does not happen to the degree it should. There are "review" meetings held but these are for the report to keep the manager up to date with their progress, usually for the manager to report the outcomes to someone more senior. This is where the individual manager has to look at their own personal management and they must ensure that they build both aspects of coaching into their day as good coaching in both these areas combines to build both capability and performance of the individual. All managers should be coached themselves

in personal management. How do you structure your day? Is there a balance between performance coaching and dedicated time coaching? Do you actually manage to build coaching time in?

I am not going to start to discuss time management techniques here; there are numerous books on the subject! It is though vitally important if good coaching is to happen.

In summary:

As a manager, contract how best you are going to work with your report. Build into that contract the fact that you would like to and are going to put time aside for coaching. If you are a specialised coach build a little extra into the contract around confidentiality and trust. Make sure that you contract with all your relevant "stakeholders". Trust comes from managing expectations and keeping to the contract.

Once the contract is established, start to build in time in order to start coaching, putting time aside not only to Performance Coach but also to coach within Dedicated Time. If you are struggling with the number of tasks that you have to perform as a manager then look at ways of developing your time and personal management. Putting time aside for your reports in order to discuss and coach them through their objectives, issues and dreams can move them forward as individuals in a big way!