

Developing Coaching in Organisations

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Coaches limit their ability if they only coach and do not experience coaching from the coachee position. Here Angus McLeod looks at training interventions to support coaching development for Managers.

Coaching Facilitating, not Telling

True coaching (as opposed to mentoring) has its basis in a process that facilitates change, enabling the coachee to use both their own experience and new perceptions to give them solutions. The coachee-ownership is critical because motivation comes from emotion; an emotional investment in an 'owned' solution is likely to be more compelling than that for a direction provided by someone else. True coaching supports the general move to more self-directed work. Necessarily, this demands that the coach is flexible, patient and is content when a coachee has committed to action, even when the coach can think of a 'better' course of action!

Three Principle instruments of Coaching

The three Principal Instruments of coaching are questions, challenge and silence. The most familiar to executive coaches is the use of questioning (rather than directive statements or leading questions).

Questioning may support coaching in many ways. Here are just some examples:

- Developing understanding of the issue and its context
- Exploring historical situations with positive outcomes
- Defining what is in the control and what is out of control of the coachee
- Redefining the target(s) and the time-scales to success
- Encouraging new perceptions
- Helping the coachee to fully associate (experience) their situation/state
- Helping the coachee to disassociate from their situation and be more objective
- Re-evaluating value-judgments
- Revisiting limiting beliefs
- Recognition of patterns
- Evaluating behaviors in the context of the coachee's identity and values
- Defining the level of certainty the coachee has about their success (motivation)

Questions help define the boundaries of the coachee's world-view. Questions also assist them to re-evaluate those boundaries and extend what is possible, to gain 'Conscious Perception'. One example may illustrate the depth of detail that underpins questioning best practice.

Angus: "Helena, do you recall a significant meeting with Alan that represents your typical engagement with him?"
Helena: "Yes I do."

Angus: "I'd like you to have an **experience** of being in that meeting now. Put whatever you need to make this experience as real as you can. How light is it? Where is that light coming from? How warm or cold is it? Where is Alan? How does your body feel? Has Alan spoken? If he has spoken, how does he sound?"

Helena was encouraged to re-experience the meeting with all her senses active. She entered a state of recall, an 'induced state.' I did not know what she was experiencing and did not need to know. However, I did want a check on how perfectly she was experiencing the situation.

Angus: "On a scale of **zero through ten**, how real is this experience?"
Helena: "Eight."
Angus: "Eight is good. Do whatever you need to do to make this experience even more real."

The language of the coach is facilitating, not directive and in this example we see that I was careful not to lead the coachee by using language that assumed her experience to be one solely of feeling or visual recall, for example. I used the word 'experience' rather than asking how she 'felt'. Had I asked how she felt, Helena might well have reacted by saying, "What has feeling got to do with it?" The last scaling question '*On a scale of zero through ten..*' is enormously useful in obtaining feedback and makes redundant the need for assumptions on the part of the coach. This is also highly useful where the coach is working free of context but still wishes to ensure that the coachee is moving towards a satisfactory and motivated outcome.

Challenges have similar outcomes to questions but the approach is more confrontational. For example, a challenge may require the reassessment of a firm belief. Challenges can be offered as statements or questions and can be especially helpful where a coachee is very stuck in a pattern of negative thought. Here are examples:

Giles: "*I'm useless at presentations!*"
Coach: "*So, you are the worst presenter on the planet?*"
Giles: "*I'm not that bad.*"
Coach: "*What are you 'not that bad' at, in presentations?*"

Here, the aim of the challenge is to encourage the coachee to reframe their perception of their abilities so that they may have the confidence to do something about their skill level. The next intervention provides a base for that by exploring positives.

John: "*The problem is insurmountable!*"
Coach: "*You are probably right. Let's ignore it and work on something else.*"
John: "*I cannot ignore this, I must do something!*"
Coach: "*If I had this problem, where would be the best place for me to start now?*"

Here, the challenge is 'discounting' the enormity of the issue and very likely to get a reaction. In this case, luckily perhaps, the effect is to accept action. The coach's question is designed to get the coachee to disassociate emotionally from the issue and appeals to their ability to 'observe' the problem from outside and at the same time to 'help' the coach.

Many people with NLP training think that rapport is the overarching necessity in coaching and they are wrong. Rapport is necessary in establishing a working

relationship. A coach who is unwilling to be unpopular in their interventions will restrict the high pace at which many emotionally-stable executives can progress.

The third Instrument is Silence [McLeod, A.I. (2002). 'The Power of Silence' *Effective Consulting* 1, 8, 31-32]. Of the three, this is, strangely, the most potent. Major, cathartic change most frequently takes place when the coachee is psychologically remote from dialogue (whether external or internal). Learning and change is happening in the spaces. This is a little like music. It was Sting who said that the spaces in music are as important as the notes. The opening bars of Beethoven's fifth Symphony, Da,da,da, daaaaaa..... Da,da,da daaaaaa, provide spaces in which attention is demanded and investment in the music begins. Chopin, Elgar and Mahler contain exquisite examples of how space provides the real poignancy and power of the message. A good coach will allow quiet spaces and the coachee will already have been informed that they are to be expected. Georgeanne Lamont in her latest book [Lamont, G. (2003). *The Spirited Business*. London: Hodder & Stoughton] says that reflection leads to a deeper understanding of purpose so we can decide how to act; inner change leading to outer change.

When we get coaches together to develop their skills, we introduce these Principle Instruments before using specific coaching tools or models. Coaches learn a great deal though experiencing the coachee-position and from observing. For that reason, working in groups of three (or more) works well; one coach, one coachee and one or more observers, each of the last offering feedback. The coach is denied justification. They are encouraged to accept feedback and be responsible for learning something useful from it.

Coach, Coachee and Observer Learning

The coachee position is inspirational for learning. From the coachee position, the coach learns what techniques work best on them. In talking with others, the coach learns that what works for them can be unsuccessful or unpopular with others. This experience is a valuable foil to the enthusiastic use of a superb intervention or tool that has recently been learned. Yes, there are excellent coaching tools, but they are not always the right one for the coachee. Experiencing this reality as coachee is a critical learning step for the ambitious coach.

We provide observers with cards [Developed with Steve Breibart for our programme, '*The Power of Silence*'], with an instruction about something specific to look for during a coaching session of 7-8 minutes. Each card requests the observer to focus on:

- Quality of attention
- Leading behaviours (smiling, nodding, mirroring)
- Unnecessary interventions

Each of these provides targetted feedback from the observer and commentary from the coachee on that feedback, typically three and two minutes respectively. The three then change roles, with the new observer then getting a different instruction and the process is repeated again. We collect the learning into bigger groups for discussion. Coaches learn that interventions often get in the way of good coaching, that nodding and smiling can be counter-productive, especially when the coachee is talking about their failings. They also learn that quality of attention is a powerful and essential coaching skill.

What else can those in training learn in this format?

Changing Coaching Parameters

We set up coaching sessions where we artificially change the coaching dynamic in order to give our coaches practical experiences of what it is like to be a coachee in less-than-perfect situations. Typically we set this up with three trainees and a round of three sessions so that each has the chance to be coach, coachee and observer. An example is to provide the coach with a card that may say, 'move your chair a little closer to the coachee.' The result of moving nearer to the coachee's comfort zone can be off-putting to the coachee and the signals for that may be seen or felt by the observer too. Here are some examples:

Instructions to the Coach

Do not leave silences; talk or make interventions to fill them
If possible, introduce several stories of your own that may be similar in describing the coachee's situation
Do not repeat any of the coachee's language. If they refer to an 'issue', you might refer to it as the 'problem'
Diffuse your focus occasionally when the coachee is talking
Tighten your chest and shoulder muscles as discretely as you can during the session
Think about a holiday you enjoyed while the coachee is talking
The coachee expects a ten-minute session, try and finish it in under seven
The coachee is expecting a ten-minute session, imagine you have twenty
Breathe a little more quickly than you usually do
Adopt a relaxed and very open posture, legs and/or arms quite wide
Let your head tilt back very slightly or, if you wear glasses, look under or over the lenses
Look briefly at your watch three or four times near the end of the session
Quietly tap a finger when the coachee is talking

Coachee and observer feedback provide stunning learning about the major impact that tiny changes in the coaching dynamic make. By experiencing the downside from the coachee perspective, coaches should become more attentive to the needs of their coachees. They learn to adopt codes of behaviour that are more likely to encourage rather than discourage work. In the examples above, I hope it is obvious that these behaviours are best avoided, but the most impactful learning comes from experiencing them! Remember the Chinese adage [Translation by: Ei-Ichiro Ochiai. (1993). *J. Chem. Educ.* 44].

***Tell me, I will forget
Show me, I may remember,
Involve me, I understand***

The example of not using the coachee's language may be less obvious. We all have very specific meanings (and reactions) to language. One person's "issue" may not be their 'problem' and it is not uncommon to find the coachee say something like:

*"It's not a **problem** but the **issue** is mine certainly."*

Quite apart from the precise use of language, accurate reflection of phrases is profoundly helpful in letting the coachee know that they have been heard (even if your interpretation differs from their meaning). Many inexperienced coaches find this hard but it gets easier with practice. The trainer can ask delegates to reflect language as accurately as possible, again in groups of three. Here is an example of reflected language:

Emily: "Only ten days to go and I am already **finding sleep difficult**. My **concentration is poor** and I nearly crashed my car twice this week."

Angus: "What would you call this state when your **concentration is poor** and you **find sleep difficult**?"

Emily: "I guess it's stress."

There is another advantage to highly reflective language as it can help the coachee move to a less self-conscious state and to greater focus on their own experience, metaphors and solutions.

Two On One

Placing two coaches with one coachee can be a useful learning experience for coaches. Each coach can intervene at any time. The coaches are asked to work as fluidly as possible; it's not a contest!

Confident coaches with clear ideas about the 'best way to go' find that the methods of other coaches may sometimes be more effective. This is impactful learning.

Where the coaches are working fluidly and respectfully of each other and their coachee, the coachee and observers note that instinctive and inspired intervention of one coach can make a breakthrough in the session.

There are situations where this approach may be a useful one-off session to help a willing coachee. I am thinking of a highly intelligent executive who is using spare mental capacity on pre-emptive thought (about the tools and interventions being used) rather than staying with their material. The two-on-one dynamic for a single session will help over-load the executive's reasoning potential (particularly if trance strategies are used so that one coach is attempting to increase kinesthetic awareness (right-brain) while the other coach is making interventions that require logical (left-brain) reasoning). The two-coach strategy for a single session may be more useful than changing the coach for all of them.

Continuing Development With Co-Coaching

I have adapted the term, co-coaching [Coined in 'Performance Coaching – The Handbook for Managers, HR Professionals and Coaches, see 'about the author'], from the discipline of co-counselling where two counsellors take it in turns to

facilitate the other. In co-coaching, the pair decides on session lengths and to bring issues. Co-coaching involves two executives meeting and providing each other with a set period for coaching. After coachee feedback, they then switch positions on the same basis. They tend to meet every few weeks with a typical session length of forty minutes each way. Co-coaching provides a way to gain exposure to high-quality coaching for a simple exchange of time. It extends the learning from the training room and supports work-based experience. Changing partners every now and again provides a wider exposure to the effectiveness of different coaching tools, interventions and styles. I promote co-coaching as a means of achieving interim practice, gaining experience of being the coachee and to assist in both personal development and successfully achieved targets.

Summary

There is a great deal to learn in coaching from working in groups of three and from work outside the training room using co-coaching as a model. The three Principle Instruments of Coaching are questions, challenge and silence and these underpin all the best coaching methodologies. There is also great scope for working with coaching mindsets [McLeod, A.I. (2002). 'Mindsets for the Coach – Coaching with Attitude' *Effective Consulting*, 1, 8, 29-30 and McLeod, A.I. (1997). 'Fundamentals for the Coach' *Rapport* 37, 15-16. See also, McLeod, A.I. (1998). 'Fundamentals for the Coachee' *Rapport* 40, 37] to develop mental agility of executives. These mindsets comprise belief and value structures that are authentic within the range of beliefs and values of each individual, in other contexts.

About the Author

Angus McLeod is widely published in the fields of coaching and team development. He initiated the e-mail based mentoring service, **Ask Max** and is co-founder of The Coaching Foundation Ltd, a not-for-profit training organisation. His latest book is 'Performance Coaching: The Handbook for Managers, HR Professionals and Coaches' (Crown House. ISBN. 1904 424 058) and he is author of 'Me, Myself, My Team' (also Crown House). Purchases available at www.crownhouse.com/

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Provides a background to the core instruments of coaching in questions, challenges and silence, the three 'principle instruments'. Group work is described to enhance learning about quality of attention, inappropriate behaviours and the importance of silence.