

Performance Coaching & Mentoring in Organisations

By Angus McLeod, PhD

Performance coaching and mentoring are both gaining wider appeal with more companies starting to develop these skills in their staff by seeking training programmes and procuring external provision of these services. Sometimes these are delivered together. There is still a lot of confusion in the organisations about what coaching and mentoring are with the words used interchangeably. So let's begin with what have now evolved as definitions of coaching and mentoring and how both disciplines are now applied at the top level.

Coaching & Mentoring

Coaching is a facilitative process, stimulating and challenging a coachee to new perceptions about their current issues (and goals) with a clear target in focus. A facilitative process means that the coach does not provide answers and solutions, but stimulates the coachee to find new and motivated thinking to meet their goals.

By contrast, classical mentoring is a process of 'show and tell' but still concerned with current issues and future aspirations. Mentors are often colleagues or retired colleagues with considerable knowledge of the sector and the internal politics.

Short-term and Long-Term Productivity

In mentoring, the solutions and directions come from the mentor¹. These provide short-term benefits that the mentee can apply immediately to a current issue(s) with measurable gains. However, the mentee is learning little about the mental processes that lead to these new solutions. There is little scope therefore to apply the new approaches to other challenges unless very similar to the original issue.

The mentoring relationship is one of dependence in which learning and developmental growth are typically slower and less impactful than for coaching.

Pure, facilitative coaching encourages independent thinking and so has a lasting developmental impact on performance. Thus, coaching is one of the most powerful tools of change in organisational culture change. The coachee is not only learning new ways to tackle challenges, but they learn new mental approaches that are applied to a whole range of challenges in the future. The coachee also learns how to stimulate their own motivation; coaching involves significant probing of internal resources and commitment to success, in establishing goals.

Mixing Coaching & Mentoring

Budgetary constraints mean that many companies cannot afford to put in place adequate coaching provision of perhaps 6-12 months duration with coaching every two-to-three weeks. Such time frames radically change the ability of executives to deal with all new challenges independently, using the myriad of new mental skills they have learned with their coach.

¹ See for example, Bridoux, D.C. & Merlevede, P.E. *Mastering Mentoring and Coaching with Emotional Intelligence*, 2004 (Crown House, Carmarthen, UK).

Most contracts are now only for 4-8 sessions (some of which may be telephone based) and so we and others now offer a flexible approach that is based on coaching but allows mentoring interventions during the sessions. All my fellow coaches signal these interventions by saying something like, "I would like to offer you mentoring input, is that okay with you?" This is an important change from our previous delivery of either coaching OR mentoring. In short-term contracts we are invariably delivering both fluidly.

Learning from Max

Ask Max was probably the first e-mail based mentoring service in the world². We first provided e-mentoring to Sainsbury's in about 1999. The format of mentoring I established then is one we still use today. Now we are also using it in face-to-face mentoring interventions. The basis of these interventions is to offer not one solution, but three. The reason behind this is simple. Where you offer one solution, the mentee will typically accept or reject it without further input. It is a simple yes/no decision based upon their current thinking patterns. Sometimes they may adapt that strategy, but not often.

Because all brains are basically adapted to compare, two solutions typically leads to basic comparing and to a preference for one or the other. Again, without further mentee input or new thinking. When the mentee is given three solutions, things become more complicated as the comparing process means undertaking several comparisons concurrently, viz.

A + B
B + C
A + C

As the comparing begins, the mentee will typically switch give up the comparing process and start to do higher-level processing. This can invoke new adaptations and creativity based upon their own experiences. The result is likely to be a new idea, previously inaccessible to the coachee.

We now use the three-solutions/ideas approach regularly in our mentoring interventions with good effect.

Does Coaching Work?

It is reported³ that coaching delivers, on average, a return of investment (RoI) of five point seven times the original investment. More research is needed and with the help of the International Society of Neuro-Semantics⁴ and fresh academic interest we aim to provide more rigorous evidence over the next few years.

Coaching Tools and Disciplines

There are many different forms of coaching based upon uni-dimensional models. These include Transactional Analysis Coaching, Emotional Intelligence Coaching, GROW Model coaching, NLP Coaching and so on. It appears however that the tools used are **not** the most important criteria for successful coaching. As Tim Gallwey

² See McLeod, A.I. *Performance Coaching: The Handbook for Managers, HR Professionals and Coaches*, 2003 (Crown House, Carmarthen, UK).

³ Manchester Incorporated Consultancy, 2001, Florida.

⁴ See www.neurosemantics.com

says⁵, “Principles are more important than tools”. In other words, provided the coach/mentor has accomplished ability with a range of useful interventions, it is the quality of the coach and their ability to demonstrate core competencies that are most important. Lets look at both of these now.

Qualities of the Coach / Mentor

It may be helpful to set down a basic list of qualities that are useful to both coaching and mentoring practice. In deciding who is naturally adapted for coaching, this list provides a snapshot of factors that seem to be present in the most impactful coaches.

- Authenticity⁶
- Respectful
- Hopeful
- Trusting
- Patient
- Valuing people and their solutions
- Passionate interest in people
- Inquisitive
- Status
- Creative
- Open-minded
- Continually developing mental aptitude

The above are critical in establishing a good working level of rapport and trust. Once rapport and trust have been established, the potential for higher-level risk and change becomes possible in their coachees/mentees.

Valuing people and their solutions is important since many novice coachees prefer their own solutions to those of the coachee and so keep pushing **against** them rather than working with the coachee’s own talents and motivations.

Being open-minded is important and will include a variation on the belief that ‘anything is possible’. If the coach has limited ideas about what is achievable, they become a hindrance to coachee progress at outstanding pace.

There is little doubt that a history of self-development, having a real feeling for what it is like to risk and change one’s own thinking, is critically important. With the best coach, many coachees will make massive leaps of faith, risking to transform the way they work. They are more likely to do that with coaches that have walked the talk in their own self-development. In our line of work, miracle is frequent.

Status is a quality that has to do with presence. Status can be artificially increased by speaking slowly using the abdomen to lower the tone of the voice, by standing, making symmetrical movements and so on. That is not what we mean here.

⁵ Gallwey, T. ICF Plenary lecture, 1999.

⁶ McLeod, A. Coaching – The Under Fives metaphor and Authenticity, *Organisations & People*, **11**, 2, 30-36, 2004, also McLeod, A. The Authentic Coach & The Exquisite Self, *Anchor Point*, **17**, 6, 52-59, 2003.

In the context of coaching there are two scenarios where status is important. In the selling of coaching, organisations are looking for quality, not just in the terms of the supplying company but also in the profiles of the coaches. The status of the supplier can be checked by taking references. The status of coaches is likely to be enhanced by references and independent quotes concerning their coaching performance.

Some consultancy companies only supply coaches who have had very senior appointments in organisations and I am sometimes retained for that reason alone, even though the organisation has had no contact with me at all. This is disappointing since there are numerous, highly talented coaches who have little or no experience of senior management. If there is a limitation, surely it is in the minds of the people who hire on that basis? The status of all our coaches is based upon skills, personal qualities and coaching ability.

Authenticity manifests as an honest acceptance of self, a willingness to be open, including a willingness to share vulnerability and weakness.

Authentic people can listen acutely because their heads are not busy with editing, self-doubts or rehearsing the next intervention. As listening is a core competence of both coaching and mentoring, it is listed below.

The Knowledge Enigma

Tim Gallwey found that he had to teach less so that he could coach better and by this he meant that knowledge can get in the way of good coaching. John Whitmore relates a story that demonstrates that exactly. When introducing the Inner Game successfully into the UK, John ran out of tennis coaches (who had been trained to facilitate using the Inner Game strategy). He hired Inner Game golf facilitators to make up the numbers needed for a large tennis training event. John found that the greatest tennis-performance improvements were made by those delegates with golf coaches. It seems then, that if the coach has very little knowledge of the specific working practice of a coachee, it can enhance the improvement that the coachee then makes. This supports the whole theory on which the benefits of coaching are proclaimed. That is, that people are more effective when they find their own solutions than when they are taught.

Core Competencies of Coaching & Mentoring

Whether coaching or mentoring, there are several core competencies (rather than models or tools) that are critical to the underpinning of best practice.

- Active listening
- Creating a supportive and safe presence for high-risk work
- Questioning skills and appropriate use of them
- Ability to facilitate psychological state-change
- Effective feedback skills
- Ability to challenge and risk rapport
- Ability to widen perception and increase choice where appropriate
- Teasing out goals and steps to goals that are realistic
- Provoking goals that are a stretch, motivated and where commitment is certain
- Ability to work effectively with emotional states

Active Listening

Active listening is often compromised by self-doubt, worrying and rehearsing and so the novice coach may miss both the content and the meaning of what the coachee is saying and showing. People who listen well will be able to reflect the language of the coachee in their responses and interventions. This reflection of the coachee's language shows the coachee that they have been heard and understood and is one of the greatest gifts that a coach can bring to their coachees.

Coachee: "I have been finding that my confidence to speak is less when my boss is in the room"

Coach: "So, when your boss is in the room, you have found up until now that your confidence to speak is less. When you find your confidence is less in meetings where your boss is present, what are you noticing externally and internally?"

As a discipline of learning, we urge our trainee coachees to practice using reflective language in training sessions. The other enormous benefit of reflective language is that less of the coaches' language is expressed (which would otherwise interrupt the coachee's process of learning).

Questions & Challenge

Questions have many purposes, for the coachee to gain definition and insight, to encourage a state-change, to increase choice, to probe the meaning of the coachee's experience, to establish goals and steps in a plan and to check confidence. The Ranking Question is a great question since it uses the coachee's own frame of reference to establish their confidence, their motivation, the importance of a goal to them:

Coach: So, zero to ten, where ten is high, how important is achieving this goal to you?

Coach: So, zero to ten, how motivated are you to carry out this task successfully in the time span you have established?

Coach: So, zero to ten, how certain are you to succeed in this goal?

Some coaches are afraid to challenge their coachees. But the best coaches will challenge and give penetrating feedback because they know that the therapeutic result can be both novel and valuable. Michelle Duval⁷ is a master coach working mainly in Australia and has been nicknamed 'the terrier' for her penetrating accuracy and impact in questioning – she has no fall-out from this, indeed is sought out because of her talent. From my own work with CEOs I also find that they are so rarely challenged that they find this aspect of my coaching very valuable indeed. Novice NLP coaches often limit themselves because they have been trained to believe that rapport is not only a key foundation of NLP but that it should also be maintained in coaching. When they can risk established rapport they are able to coach much more effectively.

State Change and Emotional Intelligence

State-change offers the coachee the possibility to increase their personal resource by re-experiencing a positive historical situation where they were successful, or to gain motivation from having a very real experience of what their goal will be like, when they achieve it.

⁷ See www.equilibrio.com.au

Coaches will experience emotional states and so it is useful if they have high emotional intelligence themselves and ideally, a counselling or other person-centred therapeutic background to underpin their coaching skills. Where emotional states arise there is opportunity for major personal growth, a poor coach will miss that opportunity through lack of experience and ability.

Conclusion

Performance coaching is a growing support to organisations. Suppliers and coaches both need to understand the relative benefits of coaching and mentoring and where necessary to compromise by using a combination of both. It is important that suppliers and organisations both understand more about the qualities and core competencies of great coaches and make sure that the coaches they use meet the highest standards available. Coaching at its best does not just offer a promise of increased productivity, but can deliver it where sufficient resources are made available. Mentoring engenders dependency whereas coaching engenders independence. Short-term gains can be made by mentoring but sustained performance based on new mental processing is best made by coaching in the longer term.

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