

## Coaching v Managing

***It's generally recognised that coaching is more effective than managing. But what does this mean for someone running a team? What are the benefits and the barriers? How can you become an effective team coach?***

The probability is that most people reading this piece will have “manager” or perhaps “director” in their title. I doubt any will be called “coach”.

In the world of sport, the terms “manager” and “coach” are much used. Often they appear to be interchangeable. As I write this, Alan Shearer appears to be losing his battle to become manager of Newcastle United. But would his role anyway be better described as coach? What's the difference between the two?

When people are asked what a manager does they tend to respond with words such as – planning, resource allocation, recruiting, controlling costs, analysis, dealing with customers etc.

When asked what a coach does, the answers are very different – leading, motivating, listening, encouraging, identifying training needs, inspiring, winning and getting results.

Which role would you rather have?

Research amongst 1500 practising managers across a broad selection of organisations, conducted by The Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership (CEML), reveals the qualities people seek in their leaders. They are:

- Inspiration (55%)
- Strategic thinking (41%)
- Forward looking (36%)
- Honesty (26%)
- Fair-mindedness (23%)
- Courage (21%)
- Supportiveness (20%)
- Knowledge (19%)

Sadly, whilst “inspiration” is desired by 55%, the reality is that only 11% of managers claim to have experienced it from their leaders.

The research found that the most successful leaders are those who learn to share their challenges by empowering, trusting, developing and coaching their teams.

As Alan Fairweather, an author on management and motivation says, “You will ultimately be judged on the success of your staff, rather than your ability to complete a report on time.”

### **So what is this thing they call “coaching”?**

Well for a start, it's not what many people think it is.

It's not about telling people what to do and how to do it. Coaching is about helping the coachee achieve their goals, maximise their potential and learn in the process.

In coaching, the coach is a facilitator, not an adviser. The coach remains non-judgemental throughout and uses open questions to raise the awareness of the coachee.

The responsibility for action lies entirely with the coachee, not with the coach. And the choice of **what** to action also lies with the coachee.

This immediately raises some questions about how easy a typical manager would find coaching. There are some challenges:

- It may be hard for a manager not to judge, when they are used to doing exactly that in much of what they do
- It may be tempting for the manager to jump in and rescue the coachee by offering advice and ideas
- It could be hard to resist the temptation to take a short cut and just tell someone what to do when time is pressing
- It might be difficult for the coachee to be entirely open and honest with their manager about how they feel
- It may be challenging for the manager to move from a performance management role to a coaching role

So what does a manager need to do to become an effective coach?

**It starts with belief.**

You need to believe in the potential of each and every one of your staff. You need to demonstrate daily that you trust them to do a great job and to take their own decisions.

There has been well-documented research conducted in the field of education, where teachers are told, wrongly, that a group of average pupils are either scholarship candidates or have learning difficulties. They teach a set curriculum for a given period before the pupils are tested. The tests show that the pupils' results, irrespective of their ability, live up (or down) to the expectations of their teachers.

John Whitmore says, "Unless the manager or coach believes that people possess more capability than they are currently expressing, they will not be able to help them express it. They must think of their people in terms of their potential, not their performance."

**It needs commitment.**

You have to be prepared to spend quality time with each of your people, getting to know them thoroughly and allowing them to get to know you. This will allow you to understand their motivations and tailor your questions to their situation. It will build a level of trust that will allow for more open and honest feedback both ways.

### **It involves feedback.**

Coaching is not just something that is done in a formal session behind closed doors. It's something that should be done consistently throughout the day. You should take any opportunity to observe what is happening and to give positive feedback and praise for things done well. Feedback should be specific and praise should be backed up by evidence. Equally, you should be prepared to give direct feedback on things done less well, using questions to raise the coachee's awareness and help them seek better solutions.

### **The GROW model**

Then there are more formal models such as the GROW model of coaching. This is a simple but incredibly effective template for holding a coaching discussion.

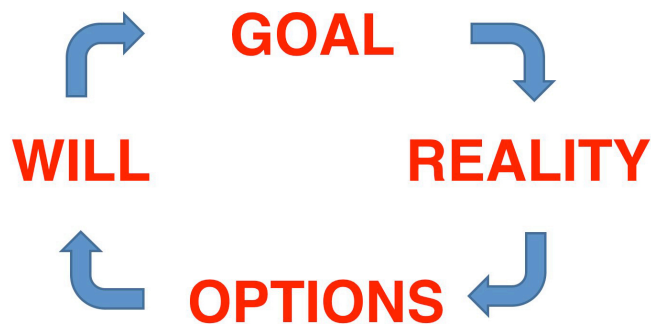


Figure 1 – The GROW model

**G stands for Goal.** What is the coachee's goal – what are they trying to achieve long term? How can that be broken down into manageable chunks? And what is the specific goal for the discussion?

**R stands for REALITY.** What is the current reality? What is the issue? What has been done so far that has helped? What are the barriers to achieving the goal?

**O stands for OPTIONS.** What has been tried already? How could you build on that? What else could you try? What if money and time was no object?

**W stands for WILL.** Which option will have the greatest impact? What exactly will you do? When will you do it? What resources might you need to be successful? What is your level of commitment to action?

Sometimes it's appropriate to use the entire model. Sometimes, by raising awareness of the real goal and the current reality, the solution(s) will become obvious quite quickly. Many people who experience coaching for the first time find that simply having the opportunity to articulate their thoughts about an issue can be very liberating and can lead rapidly to clarity about what they need to do.

Lack of time is often quoted as a major obstacle to adopting a coaching style. But the reality is that most coaching managers will claim that coaching saves them time in the long run.

It's also possible to coach in a very short space of time. Max Landsberg in his book "The tao of coaching" describes what he calls "instant payoff coaching" which can be effective in as little as five minutes.

### **But is coaching always the answer?**

No it isn't. If someone is to really benefit from coaching, two things should ideally be in place.

The person being coached needs to be willing to make change to improve. And arguably they need a level of skill, knowledge or experience that will enable them to develop solutions with the help of the coach. The "skill/will" spectrum, in short.

So you might not use coaching with the greenest of the green or with someone who clearly has no commitment to change. And you might not use coaching in circumstances where urgent action overrides any need for personal development – if there's a fire in the building, you probably wouldn't start by asking open questions.

But in most circumstances, a coaching style is appropriate and the benefits of coaching are considerable.

The person being coached feels empowered, enthused and energised. They learn and grow as individuals. They have a much greater level of commitment to action. They are inspired and are willing to stretch to greater heights, because the solutions and actions have some from inside themselves.

The coach gets a tremendous sense of satisfaction from visibly unlocking someone's potential and seeing them grow. They gain great insight into the individual and the issue. They take the responsibility off their own shoulders and place it (responsibly) with others.

### **The inner game**

Anyone who has read "The inner game of tennis" by Tim Galwey, will understand the basis of coaching. Tim quotes an equation:

#### **Performance = Potential – Interference**

The fact is that we all have the potential to perform at a certain level in any activity. But our performance is often reduced by interference.

The interference can be external or internal. Much of it is internal - the judging voice that exists in most of our minds that constantly tells us we're not good enough or worries about what we're going to say or do next.

Coaching distracts people from the interference by achieving a much greater level of focus on what they really want to achieve, what is the current reality, what options are available to them and what action they need to take.

It delivers sharper **focus**, greater **awareness** and an enhanced sense of personal **responsibility**.

If you'd like to learn more about coaching, you could do worse than read "Coaching for Performance" by John Whitmore. It's an easy read and will give a good grounding in the principles.

You won't regret it and your team certainly won't.

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