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Rob Yeung

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Coaching People

Rob Yeung

ESSENTIALS

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Preface

So many people feel bored and uninspired by their work. It's a sad fact that many organisations do not tap the full potential of their people. A lot of people would gladly quit their jobs if they could just afford it! This book is aimed at people who want to unlock the potential of the individuals they work with.

Work does not have to be a dull and uninspiring chore that people do just to pay the bills. Everyone has unique skills and talents that are just waiting to be unleashed, and coaching is the key to unlocking that potential to the benefit of the individual, the organisation and the coach.

This book is addressed at people who want to help others find a sense of direction and develop their skills. There are plenty of books out there that will provide complicated models of coaching. However, coaching isn't rocket science. It just requires a willingness to learn and a desire to help develop other people. This book tells you the essentials – what really matters – if you want to develop other people and at the same time help yourself to deliver results.

Rob Yeung

1 Understanding Coaching

Understanding what coaching is and why it's important is your first step to becoming a great coach.

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really matter

- 1 WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?
- 2 PULLING, NOT PUSHING
- 3 COACHING ATTRIBUTES AND QUALITIES
- 4 A FIVE-STAGE MODEL OF COACHING

Do you want to work in a place where people are enthusiastic to face new challenges and learn new skills? Do you want to be with colleagues who work to the best of their abilities? Would you like to have colleagues who give each other constructive feedback and advice? The answer is probably yes to all of these questions.

Coaching is about **unlocking the potential** of your colleagues to maximise their effectiveness at work and at the same time achieve all the above aims. It's about **helping rather than forcing** people to learn.

Coaching is challenging for both the coach and the person being coached – but anyone can learn it, especially if you **take it one step at a time**. However, you will need to adopt certain **attributes** if you are to do it well.

It takes time to develop people so it's a case of investing some time in the short-term to reap substantial rewards in the medium-term.

IS THIS YOU?



● *I've never had any formal management training before. Is coaching important?* ● *People around here spend so much time watching the clock and leave at 5pm on the dot every day – they don't seem to care about their jobs at all.* ● *I've been promoted and suddenly I have a team of people working for me – help!* ● *I don't think my company will let me waste time coaching – we have work to do!* ● *I'd like to coach but I've never had any training – what should I do?* ● *I delegate my work – is that not the same as coaching?* ● *I know coaching will help the people I coach, but what's in it for me?* ● *We spend a fortune paying for people to go on training courses and never seem to see any benefit.*



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

It's a common misconception to think that coaching is something you do only to help other people out. There are **many benefits** to doing it – for yourself, the person you are coaching, and the organisation where you work – so it would be foolish *not* to do it.

For the person you are going to coach, or the **coachee**, there are many benefits. As an individual being coached, he or she will:

- Have an opportunity to develop and improve in the way they want to.
- Be able to speak in confidence about problems or issues.
- Get feedback on their strengths and weaknesses.
- Be able to ask 'silly' questions, talk about new ideas, and try out new skills without the fear of embarrassment.
- Learn at their own pace.

Your organisation should **encourage you to spend time coaching others**, because it too will benefit. Your organisation will:

- Gain a more motivated workforce.
- Create an atmosphere that encourages people to learn new skills rather than stagnate and get bored.
- Save time otherwise spent away at expensive courses.
- Improve the quality of the work done by its employees.

But **you too will benefit from coaching others**. For example, you will:

- Develop more honest relationships with your colleagues.
- Have the satisfaction of seeing others grow and get better at their jobs.
- Improve the skills of those around you, making your job easier too.
- Hone your own interpersonal skills – many of which can be applied to all human relationships, in and out of work.
- Create a strong following. After all, if you help other people, they are more likely to help you out.
- Be recognised by others as someone who has a desire and the ability to develop others. This is a key skill that is often looked for in top managers.

The people I work with are always watching the clock, counting the minutes until they get home. Is there any way to help them enjoy their work a bit more?

② PULLING, NOT PUSHING

Surprisingly, a lot of managers, team leaders and supervisors still think that ‘managing people’ means simply telling other people what to do. Increasingly, the people who are the best at managing others are those who spend time coaching others.

Coaching is about **providing encouragement** (e.g. ‘come on, you can do it!’) as opposed to threats (e.g. ‘do it or else!’) It’s about **empowering and inspiring** people rather than directing and controlling them. And it’s about getting people to want something, not telling people what you want.

Coaching is a method of guiding and supporting an individual in their pursuit of improved performance at work.

Coaching can involve giving feedback on performance, challenging occasionally, and providing emotional support. But it always requires asking **insightful questions** to help a coachee to come up with solutions at their own pace.

③ COACHING ATTRIBUTES AND QUALITIES

Later chapters cover some of the skills that a good coach needs. These include:

- A **desire to help other people** improve themselves and do well at work.
- The **right attitude** towards coaching. If you give the impression that coaching isn’t very important, your coachees will probably not treat it very seriously either.
- **Respect for the choices that a coachee makes.** People differ in what they value in life and you have to accept these differences.

- **Patience!** Different people learn at different rates, some take longer to understand things. Being impatient and hurrying a coachee will undermine their confidence. Don't give up too soon.
- An **appropriate sense of humour**. Coaching can be difficult at times, and the occasional smile or joke to lighten the atmosphere will help. However, sarcasm or humour at the expense of others just will not do.
- **Good judgement**. Use this book as a guide rather than a rulebook; if something doesn't work for you, don't do it. For example, if after several sessions you believe that the coachee is not benefiting from your coaching, you may have to take the difficult decision to find a more appropriate person to coach the coachee.

Use your common sense to adapt material and approaches from this book and other sources.

④

A FIVE-STAGE MODEL OF COACHING

It can be useful to think about coaching as a series of **five logical steps**. Many coaches will coach along these lines – even if they don't realise that they are using this model. The five stages are:

1. **Setting up**. Figure out who to coach and how you are going to do the coaching.
2. **Building rapport**. Ask questions and really understand what your coachee has to say in order to build up an atmosphere of trust.
3. **Assessing the situation**. Find out what makes a coachee tick and what they want to achieve at work.

4. **Providing feedback.** Get some objective feedback on how a coachee is doing.
5. **Making changes.** Get a coachee to commit to making some changes.



MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

- ✓ Understand that coaching doesn't just benefit a coachee. Your organisation benefits, and so will you in the long-term.
- ✓ Recognise that coaching is very different from how you may have been (or are currently) managed or supervised in the past. It's about generating enthusiasm and willingness rather than creating negative feelings and having to overcome reluctance.
- ✓ Know that coaching isn't easy! Be patient and exercise good judgement at all times. Demonstrate respect and, at times, a sense of humour. But above all, you must really want to help develop other people.
- ✓ Use the five-stage model of coaching as a framework for you to think about coaching in a systematic way. Thinking and preparing for each step will help you to deliver the greatest benefit to your coachee.

2 Setting Up

Preparation, forethought and the right state of mind are the keys to initiating a successful coaching relationship.

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things that
really matter

- 1 CHOOSING WHO TO COACH FIRST
- 2 INITIATING CONTACT
- 3 AGREEING PARAMETERS
- 4 RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE
- 5 SETTING GROUND RULES

No one has as much time as they would like and coaching takes more time than most people think. So think carefully about who to coach first.

Not many people in organisations will be familiar with being coached, so it's up to you to **sell the concept of coaching** to the person you want to coach.

Coaching isn't about achieving overnight success, so you need to **plan** a series of sessions to make sure that you do get results. And although the details of **how, when, and where** to coach may seem trivial, a good coach will pay attention to these and **explain the nature of the coaching relationship** so that both you and the coachee get the most out of it.

If you don't get the set-up right, you could be wasting your time completely.

IS THIS YOU?



• *I have too many people in my team to coach them all.* • *I think I'd like to coach my team, but I don't know where to start.* • *Should I run a coaching session once a week or once a month?* • *I don't have the time to coach.* • *I did a coaching session, but David's behaviour didn't seem to change.* • *My boss isn't very good and could benefit from coaching – should I start with her?* • *I keep having to cancel my coaching sessions because more important things crop up.* • *I try to tell people what's wrong with them, but they won't take my advice on board.*



CHOOSING WHO TO COACH FIRST

You can't coach everyone at the same time. So how can you prioritise who to coach first?

Craig seems very interested to learn new things. Douglas doesn't seem interested at all, but maybe he has a lot of potential. Who should I coach?

The following are some guidelines, rather than strict rules:

- **Don't pick people who have only just joined the company.** People who are very new or on their probation period are probably still trying to learn the ropes and may prefer being given more formal guidance to being coached. Given the stress of starting a new job, they probably won't have thought through their long-term objectives.
- **Don't choose people who you report to.** It is likely that you will suffer from lack of credibility if you try to formally coach your boss. However, don't assume that you should only coach people more junior or less

experienced than you – people at more or less the same level as you in the organisation may also benefit from your coaching skills.

- **Do pick existing employees who are keen to improve their skills.** Having people who are keen will make your task so much easier.

However, when you do eventually find the time, also look at the people who seem to have less ambition or desire to improve themselves. Coaching people who view their jobs as a necessary evil to pay the bills is more time-consuming and difficult, but they too can benefit. However, if you are just starting to coach people, it is easier to **begin with open-minded people** who want to be helped rather than cynics.

2

INITIATING CONTACT

Once you have decided who might be a likely candidate for coaching, set up a **pre-coaching session**.

Choose somewhere quiet to have the discussion.
Structure the agenda for the pre-coaching meeting:

- **Explain** why you think that the potential coachee would benefit from coaching.
- **Ask** the coachee whether they agree that coaching is the right thing to do.
- **Agree** when, where and for how long you should have sessions.
- **Discuss** what ground rules will govern the coaching relationship.

These points are covered in the rest of this chapter.

I've made the decision that Craig needs coaching, but he seems more interested in going on a training course. How can I win him over to the idea of one-to-one coaching?

A critical step is to **get a potential coachee's agreement to be coached**. Of course, if you are an employee's manager, a potential coachee may feel that they have no real choice but to accept. But there is a difference between putting effort into something and just doing it for the sake of appearing to.

Consequently, you will need to **persuade the individual** by **selling** the idea of coaching. You might want to refer back to some of the benefits that were outlined in Chapter 1.

Never force someone into being coached if they have valid reasons not to.

However, **ask a question** such as 'Having heard the reasons why I think you would benefit from one-to-one coaching, do you think that you would?'

The following are some of the perfectly valid reasons **not** to enter a coaching relationship:

- A training course may provide the skills that someone really needs.
- You sense – or the potential coachee tells you – that they are intimidated by you.
- The individual reveals to you that they are actively seeking a job outside the company.
- The potential coachee has a development plan of their own already – perhaps developed in conjunction with human resources or personnel.



AGREEING PARAMETERS

A single coaching session will have little or no effect on improving a person's skills and changing their behaviour. Would you expect to be able to play the piano after one lesson? Of course not! Try to arrange a series of at least four or five sessions.

Coaching requires sustained effort, practice and guidance over a period of time.

Have a break of at least a week between sessions to give the coachee the opportunity to practise some of the suggestions that you discuss. But don't leave too long a gap (more than a month or so) or you may forget exactly what was discussed.

Each session should be **at least an hour in length** so that you don't have to rush. However, more than a few hours is likely to be exhausting for both you and the coachee.

Book the coaching sessions. Once you have decided how often you should have coaching sessions, schedule them into both your diaries immediately. Try not to let non-essential meetings or other pieces of work take precedence.

However, **be flexible**. For instance, if either you or the coachee has had a bad day or has a deadline to meet, you both need to have the option of postponing until a later date. Don't just let this happen when relatively minor things crop up. If you are breaking an agreement, apologise for doing so and explain why you need to postpone.

It may be that you don't have time to spend a whole hour with each of your coachees. Perhaps you think that spending half-an-hour a couple of times a month would be more useful. The details of when, where and for how long

you hold the coaching sessions are less important than **the fact that you are having them** – just do whatever you can.

4 RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

Coaching isn't something that you can do without some forethought and preparation.

- **Don't do it when you are tired or feeling negative** – you'll only end up sniping and offering overly critical feedback. A good coach must not only identify areas for development in a constructive fashion but also highlight and reinforce strengths.
- **Don't coach when time is short.** For example, when a deadline is looming or an emergency arises, neither you nor the coachee will be in the state of mind to listen and think about developmental needs. Leave it to another time when there are less pressing matters to worry about.

When you actually come to sit down together, find a room **away from a telephone and other interruptions**. Tell your colleagues that you are not to be disturbed unless it is absolutely critical. A coachee can't be expected to open up about their problems if other employees are constantly popping their heads around the door.

Think about the positioning of the furniture in the room. Psychologists say that sitting adjacent to someone on the same side of a table – rather than directly opposite – can make them feel more at ease.

⑤ SETTING GROUND RULES

At the outset of a coaching relationship **set ground rules** for how you will deal with each other and how you will treat the information that the coachee tells you.

Critically, you need to assure a coachee that what is discussed will be **confidential**. You must promise not to share the content of your discussions with anyone else in the organisation without the permission of the coachee. You could use phrases like 'rest assured that whatever you tell me goes no further'.

If the coachee tells you something that may affect other people (for example if they know that another employee is committing a crime at work), you must try to protect their anonymity wherever possible.

If the coachee tells you something that they have done wrong and you think you need to report it to someone else, you must get their permission or at least explain what you are proposing to do. Otherwise, they could feel that you have broken your promise of confidentiality.

Chris isn't very good at making sales presentations and he attributes this to having low esteem because of bullying that he suffered during his childhood. Should I delve into his past or just try to concentrate on his skills today?

It can also be useful to **set boundaries** around what you will or will not discuss. For example, some coaches do not feel comfortable talking about personal issues such as relationships. If you are not comfortable about discussing such matters, make it clear to your coachee.

Coaching differs from counselling. Coaching is aimed at developing the personal and interpersonal skills of the coachee so that they can **work effectively, efficiently and**

enjoyably. Counselling often touches on personal issues such as relationships at home, traumas, childhood experiences and other sources of unhappiness that coaches are just not qualified to discuss. An unqualified counsellor can make a person more unhappy, so avoid offering advice on topics you are not qualified to advise on.



MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

- ✓ Think carefully about who you want to coach. Open-minded people are always the easiest to begin with.
- ✓ Sell the idea of coaching to potential coachees. But also check that they *really* want to be coached.
- ✓ Set time aside for the coaching. Having the best intentions in the world just isn't good enough unless it happens.
- ✓ Ask yourself: Have you had a bad day? Are you tired? Is there a crisis going on? If the answer to any of these is yes, it may be a good idea to put off coaching till another time.
- ✓ Make sure both you and the coachee understand exactly what topics you both feel comfortable talking about. Also, do you both understand how you might share the content of your coaching sessions with other people?

3 Building Rapport

Having an honest and open dialogue can't happen until the coachee trusts that you have their best interests at heart.

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- 1 ASKING QUESTIONS
- 2 LISTENING
- 3 ACTIVE LISTENING
- 4 DEMONSTRATING EMPATHY
- 5 DISCLOSING

Would you feel comfortable going up to your boss and admitting all your past failings and mistakes? Of course not, yet coaching requires a coachee to be completely open with you. To achieve that state of honesty, **build rapport** with your coachee by demonstrating a number of **key interpersonal skills**.

Ask questions, listen and **respond appropriately** – in a way that will help you to gain the trust of a coachee and allow you to coach effectively.

I don't really know Harry very well and he seems reticent to tell me anything. Before I can really help him, I think I have to show him that I'm a normal person too.

However, building rapport is not a step that is simply completed in order to move on. You need to build rapport at the start to get the coaching relationship off the ground, but you also need to **maintain the rapport** for as long as the coaching relationship exists.

IS THIS YOU?



● *I sometimes struggle to find the right thing to say.* ● *I have only dealt with Paul occasionally in the past so it's not surprising that he doesn't really trust my motives for offering to coach him.* ● *How can I get my coachee to start talking?* ● *I am very much focused on the task of improving someone's performance.* ● *My coachee is happy to talk about facts but seems reluctant to talk about feelings.* ● *I don't think that Nicola trusts me enough to be completely honest with me.* ● *I find it quite difficult to find out what's really important to a coachee.* ● *I tend to jump to conclusions quite quickly about how to solve a coachee's problems.*



ASKING QUESTIONS

Asking **the right sort of questions** is a key skill of coaching. You need it not only to establish where the coachee is at the moment, but also later on to help them decide on future goals.

However, becoming good at questioning is more than just having a prepared list of questions up your sleeve – it's about **your state of mind**. You have to think on your toes, listen, understand and be ready to come up with a question that will further prompt the coachee's thinking.

Every time a coachee stops talking, you won't go far wrong if you can start a relevant question with one of the following:

- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?

- How?
- Who?

Make life easy for yourself – always prepare a list of ten possible questions to ask in a coaching session.

Many people are very wary of talking about their feelings, but to coach someone effectively you need to understand every aspect of them. You need not only the facts but also the emotions that go with those facts. What makes a coachee tick? How do they feel when things don't go well? How badly does a coachee want to change something?

Asking questions that elicit feelings will help you to find out what is really important to them and the best way to motivate change.

②

LISTENING

Listening demonstrates that you are interested and encourages a coachee to speak. **Listening helps to build a coachee's confidence** and it helps you to help your coachees come up with their own solutions.

Listening is not the same as just hearing something. Hearing is a passive process, listening is an active skill that you have to work at.

Failing to listen can lead to misunderstandings and confusion, or even bruised feelings and embarrassment.

The temptation is to jump in and tell someone what they should be doing. It can be frustrating when you see the answer clearly but the coachee just doesn't seem to understand! However, this illustrates the **difference between teaching and coaching**.

Teaching is a process by which an expert shares information with a learner. The teacher is assumed to know the right answers. In coaching, on the other hand, there are **no 'right' or 'wrong' answers** – only solutions that you and your coachee together decide might work. As a result, a coachee has a greater opportunity to decide what topics are relevant as well as the speed at which they want to discuss them.

As a rule of thumb, as the coach you should be spending only **about a third of the time talking**. For the other two-thirds of the time you should be listening and giving your coachee time to think.

There are **different levels of listening**. It can be easy to daydream but pretend to be involved and interested. To coach effectively, you need to pick up not just the facts that a coachee is sharing with you, but also their feelings. For example, if someone says one thing but their face or voice is telling a different story, it's up to you to explore what is really going on. Listening only to the facts is not enough.

③ ACTIVE LISTENING

When you talk, you are showing that you are awake and aware of the topics of conversation. When you are listening, you cannot use speech to show that you are interested in the conversation.

For this reason, your **non-verbal cues** or body language play an important role in showing that you are listening.

Imagine that you are talking to someone and he or she doesn't seem interested – you're going to stop talking fairly quickly aren't you?

There are a number of things that you can do to show that you are interested:

- **Take notes.** This will show that you are listening and serve to jog your memory when you prepare for future sessions. You can also share your notes with the coachee during later sessions to show the **progress** that they have made.
- **Use your posture.** Leaning forwards towards someone during a conversation sends a message that you are interested in what they have to say.
- **Nod.** Occasional nods of the head when the coachee makes a good point show that you agree.
- **Observe and mirror facial expressions.** It is natural for people to mirror others' facial expressions – hence the adages that laughter and yawning are contagious. So when the coachee smiles, you could smile back briefly. Or when they are talking about a difficult issue, you might equally show concern on your face. Again, this demonstrates that you are listening.
- **Make affirmatory noises.** Good conversationalists use words and phrases such as 'uh-um', 'go on', and 'yes' occasionally. Most people do this naturally to show that they are following what is being discussed.

While all of these cues will help you to build rapport, don't overdo them. These cues should be presented to the coachee as if they come naturally and, with practice, they will.

A final method to show that you have understood what the coachee is talking about is to **summarise and reflect**. Listen carefully and then paraphrase what has just been

said. The technique is also useful for checking that you have got the right end of the stick. You might, for instance, begin your sentence with something such as:

- ‘From what I’m hearing, you seem to be saying that . . .’
- ‘It sounds like . . .’
- ‘So let me see if I understand you correctly, you said that you . . .’

④

DEMONSTRATING EMPATHY

It can be easy to be dismissive of other people’s problems. For example, if you have been using a particular computer system for many years, you might have forgotten how difficult it was when you were first learning to use it. Showing a coachee that **you can identify with their problems** is a great way of building rapport – it shows that you are not just a colleague but also a person with human feelings too.

Try putting yourself in the shoes of your coachee. When a coachee is telling you about a difficult situation or a particular problem, really try to **imagine what it must have felt like**. And if you do understand, tell them.

Whatever mistakes and errors of judgement a coachee reveals to you, **resist judging**. People naturally fear being put down or feeling that they are being judged. Don’t criticise, leap to conclusions or dismiss something out of hand.

Always respond, never react.

If you do find yourself responding angrily or putting someone down unintentionally, don’t beat yourself up too much – you’re human too. However, find an appropriate

moment to **apologise sincerely**. Saying I'm sorry' or 'I was wrong' and meaning it will do a lot to repair any breakdown in communication.

⑤ DISCLOSING

A good way to build rapport is to **disclose** – or to share something about your own life with the coachee. Again, it's about admitting that you have limitations and make mistakes like any other person. By doing so, you are implicitly making it okay for your coachee to admit their problems too.

There are different ways of disclosing, for example:

- **The humorous anecdote** – revealing some mistake that you once made, in a funny story. This often helps to lighten the atmosphere.
- **The learning anecdote** – a story where you begin by describing a mistake you once made and then use the story to illustrate the lesson that you learned from it.
- **The personal anecdote** – a situation where you talk about your personal hopes, fears, limitations, etc with the aim of boosting your coachee's confidence.

Telling Amelia how nervous I used to get before giving speeches made it easier for her to admit her nerves in team meetings too.



MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

- ✓ Learn to ask questions. They are the key to getting a coachee to talk about needs, hopes and fears, and ultimately the way to get them to come up with solutions.
- ✓ Most people talk too much – so learn to listen for a change! Teaching is a process of talking, while coaching is about listening and guiding a coachee to come to his or her own solutions.
- ✓ Use your body language and techniques such as summarising and reflecting to show that you are listening.
- ✓ Remember that talking honestly about difficult situations, mistakes and feelings is not easy. Show that you appreciate and understand your coachee's feelings and points of view.
- ✓ Reveal some of your own personal faults or tell a coachee about some of the mistakes you have made in the past. This will further encourage them to talk honestly with you.

4 Assessing the Situation

First you need to set a goal, then establish what a coachee is capable of.

4

things that
really matter

- 1 LEARNING TO CHALLENGE
- 2 IDENTIFYING A LONG-TERM GOAL
- 3 ESTABLISHING THE STARTING POINT
- 4 UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT ON OTHERS

People differ in what they want to achieve at work. One might have his fingers crossed about getting a promotion, while another might want to become sales representative of the year. Yet another might aspire to become the youngest chief executive in the history of the company.

Challenge your coachee to come up with a **realistic objective**. But developing a long-term goal is the relatively easy bit. More difficult is **assessing what your coachee is capable of at the moment**, in order to decide how to achieve their objective.

A vital step here is to help your coachee understand how their behaviour affects other people at work.

Jacqui is very stressed about her work at the moment – she says she has too much to do and just can't cope. So we sat down to figure out exactly what she does.

IS THIS YOU?



- *I find it really difficult to ask good questions that make people think.*
- *I don't know how well Judy is doing at the moment.*
- *My coachee seems to have no confidence, but I know she has loads of ability.*
- *What skills and abilities does my coachee have?*
- *I can't think of how to persuade a coachee to change her behaviour.*
- *I don't know what my coachee is capable of.*
- *To be honest, I'm not sure how to find out if Stephen has the right attitude to achieve his goals.*
- *I get on really well with my coachee, but how do I turn it into a productive coaching relationship?*



LEARNING TO CHALLENGE

Asking questions in order to **challenge** is sometimes necessary. There will be times when the coachee makes a negative generalisation or says something about themselves or others that is obviously untrue. You might hear coachees say things like:

- 'I've never been any good at . . .'
- 'I'm always regretting it when . . .'
- 'I can't . . .'
- 'They always say that . . .'
- 'People never give me a chance.'

Sometimes people also make overly positive statements about themselves. For example, some people think that they have excellent working relationships with all their colleagues when this is simply not the case. Be ready also to challenge coachees when they think too highly of themselves.

Helen said, ‘I just can’t do it.’ Immediately I challenged her by saying, ‘I can understand that it may feel that way at the moment, but what if you could?’

Don’t be afraid to **dispute beliefs** that involve words such as ‘never’ or ‘always’. But rather than leaping in and saying ‘you’re wrong’, **ask a question to challenge** such thoughts.

However, don’t confuse challenging with putting someone down. **Demonstrate empathy** whenever you challenge. It might help to preface your challenge with a statement such as ‘I can understand that you might feel that way, but . . .’ and then to use a question such as:

- ‘Is that always true?’
- ‘Why do you believe that?’
- ‘Why can’t you? What would happen if you could?’
- ‘Can you think of a single occasion when you might be able to?’

②

IDENTIFYING A LONG-TERM GOAL

Few people really know where they want to be or what they want to be doing in the future. And it’s difficult to plan because things always crop up – such as unexpectedly having a family, being offered a better job elsewhere, or being made redundant. Who can anticipate such things?

However, there is still value in helping a coachee to think about **where they would like to be in the medium-term**. For most people, planning for six months to a year in the future is not unreasonable.

‘The people who will win are those with a clear idea of where they want to go.’ (Lenin).

Help a coachee find something that really gets them **excited** and **feeling enthusiastic**. If it's not something they have any particularly strong feelings about, it's probably not that worthwhile a goal so why bother with it?

Useful questions you could use to prompt thinking include:

- 'What would you like to achieve in your job?'
- 'What skills do you need to make your job more enjoyable? How could you get those skills?'
- 'What would you like to happen that is not happening at the moment?'
- 'Which aspects of your job frustrate you or do you not enjoy? Is there any way you could change your job to make it better?'
- 'In which department or for which person would you like to be working?'

Don't worry about trying to get a coachee to decide goals in any great detail. You are still just generating some ideas and discussion points.

However, you might find it useful to get them to summarise their thoughts by completing a sentence such as:

- 'Within six months, I aim to . . .'
- 'By the end of the year, I want to . . .'

This sentence can be as long or as short as the coachee likes. However, you need to make sure that this goal is something they really want. You could ask questions such as:

- ‘What would it feel like if you achieved this goal?’
- ‘How disappointed would you be if you didn’t achieve this goal?’

In fact, to be a really good source of motivation the goal can be quite selfish. It doesn’t matter if your coachee wants to earn more money to be able to buy a bigger car. Who cares if they just want promotion to show off to family and friends? If the individual’s long-term goal is compatible with the organisation’s goals, selfishness is a good thing.

Finally, make a note of the coachee’s long-term goal and refer back to it later.



ESTABLISHING THE STARTING POINT

Now let’s figure out what **skills and abilities** will help your coachee reach their goal.

Good questions to start with could include:

- ‘What would you say are your strengths?’
- ‘What do you think your weaknesses are? What do you need to improve?’
- ‘How do you think other people see you? What do you think they say about you?’
- ‘What’s stopping you at the moment from achieving what you want to do?’
- ‘How can you improve the way you interact with your colleagues?’

Although these are good questions to start off a discussion, you will need to get into greater detail. For example, if a coachee talks about a particular aspect of the job they like or dislike, you could use further questions to explore the situation such as:

- ‘Why, in particular, do you dislike/like it?’
- ‘How often does this happen?’
- ‘When does this happen?’

Getting from A to B requires you to know where to find A first.

4

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT ON OTHERS

An important step in the coaching process is to help the coachee develop a **greater awareness** of how they are **perceived by others**. Individuals often do something with a particular intention, but end up communicating a completely different message to colleagues.

Improving communication is a key step to helping a coachee build better relationships with colleagues. This, in turn, will help your coachee become more effective and successful.

Steve stays later in the office than most people because he wants to show his boss how hard-working he is. Unfortunately, his colleagues think that he stays late because he is slower at getting things done than they are.

You could use some of the following questions to help prompt the coachee’s thinking about how they are perceived by others:

- ‘How do you think your colleagues might describe you?’
- ‘Do you agree with what you think your colleagues say about you?’
- ‘Do you think your colleagues ever misunderstand your behaviour or intentions?’

- 'Do you have any abilities or talents that your colleagues don't think you have? What are these? Would it make sense to tell your colleagues you can do these things?'



MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

- ✓ Be prepared to challenge both negative and overly positive assumptions. Coachees can have assumptions about themselves that are frankly wrong – you need to sort these out for their own good.
- ✓ Help your coachee choose a goal that really excites them. Having a goal to work towards can be very motivating.
- ✓ Get your coachee to start talking about their likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, perceived strengths and weaknesses. Take good notes so that you can come back to all this data later.
- ✓ Help your coachee to gain a better understanding of how their intentions and behaviours might affect other people. Thinking about other people is an important step in developing better relationships.

5 Providing Feedback

*Coaching is about enhancing performance.
So you need to measure current performance
and spur your coachee into action.*

6

things that
really matter

- 1 PREPARING TO GIVE FEEDBACK
- 2 CHOOSING RESPONDENTS
- 3 GATHERING FEEDBACK
- 4 GIVING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK
- 5 GIVING POSITIVE FEEDBACK
- 6 ELICITING REACTIONS TO FEEDBACK

Coaching is not just about making people feel better. You are trying to develop coachees to carry out their work more effectively, efficiently and enjoyably.

However, it can be difficult to change a coachee's bad behaviour for the better if they do not see the need to change. Sometimes, your advice and opinions alone will not be enough to persuade a coachee of the need to change.

Gathering **feedback** from a number of colleagues or even customers and clients provides better evidence that will **help the coachee to understand the need to change**. However, feedback is not just about pointing out **shortcomings** that need rectifying. It is just as important to highlight **good points** for the coachee to build on too.

When I told Emma that she could sound very insincere during meetings, she didn't believe me. It was only when I'd got some feedback from some of her colleagues that she believed me.

After a number of coaching sessions, you can gather more feedback to measure progress and see whether things have changed for better or worse.

IS THIS YOU?



● *Why should my coachee listen to what I have to say about her? I'm no better than she is!* ● *I tend to give too much praise and find it difficult to point out bad aspects.* ● *I find it difficult to tell someone what is wrong with them without getting aggressive.* ● *People think that Nicola is a bit tactless at times but she can't see that. What's the best way to tell her?* ● *My coachees don't seem to take notice of my criticisms.* ● *I'm not worried about hurting someone's feelings a bit – it's more important to tell them the truth.* ● *My coachee just gets really angry when I give him negative feedback.* ● *My coachee keeps saying 'I can't change' and I don't know how to persuade her that she can.*



PREPARING TO GIVE FEEDBACK

It can be difficult for coachees to take on board – let alone act on – what they don't want to hear. To make your case compelling, prepare and choose your words carefully.

For many years, people have given feedback as 'strengths' versus 'weaknesses'. However, it has recently become more common for 'weaknesses' to be called '**areas for improvement**' or '**areas for development**'. The word 'weaknesses' is very emotive and implies that there is something wrong with a person – the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines one meaning of the word as 'a defect'. The advantage of using terms such as 'areas for improvement' or 'areas for development' is that they suggest that something

can be done about them – to improve or develop them – whereas defective things tend to get thrown away.

Whether you plan to collect feedback from other people or just provide feedback based on your own observations, the following guidelines will help you give feedback that is as painless and useful to the coachee as possible:

- **Be specific.** Saying ‘you’re doing a great job’ is less useful than telling a coachee that ‘your colleagues liked the quality of the report you wrote.’ Similarly, complaining about ‘poor work is less useful than saying what exactly was poor about it.
- **Cite examples and evidence** to back up your claims. To back up a claim that, for example, ‘people think you are lazy’, add an observation of indisputable behaviour such as ‘you have been late four times in the last month.’
- **Separate hearsay from fact.** For example, don’t tell someone that ‘your presentation wasn’t very good’ if you actually mean that ‘someone thought that your presentation wasn’t very good.’

Giving feedback is one of the hardest things a coach has to do.



CHOOSING RESPONDENTS

If you do decide to gather feedback from other people, choose a number of **respondents**. They are the people you will invite to comment or respond on the coachee’s performance at work.

Remember that you are doing this in a coaching role – you are **not appraising or judging the coachee** at all. Because you are coaching the individual, the two of you together need to choose the respondents. Of course you

can suggest respondents you think would be suitable to give feedback, but you must listen if the coachee believes that another person would be more appropriate.

The more respondents you talk to, the richer will be your picture of how a coachee is perceived. However, gathering feedback is a time-consuming process. Aim to get feedback from approximately **six respondents** who have quite a lot of contact with the coachee on a day-to-day basis. Less than four may give you an unbalanced view and more than eight will have diminishing returns.

Try to **speak to a mix of colleagues** at a variety of levels within the organisation as well as a few people from outside the organisation such as customers, clients or suppliers. Having discussions with a wide range of respondents will allow you to see whether a coachee behaves equally with all people.

I've always thought that Ian does a great job. The senior managers also said that he was very polite and hard-working. However, it was only when I spoke to the secretarial staff that I learned how rude and disrespectful he is to junior staff. Lots of room for improvement there!

③

GATHERING FEEDBACK

The best way to collect feedback is to **have a discussion** with someone – preferably **face-to-face**. However, doing it over the **telephone** is fine when you don't have the time or if the respondent has moved to a new department in another part of the country.

Respondents need time to gather their thoughts and think of relevant examples, so give some **advance warning** – maybe a quick telephone call or a short letter. If you do

not know the respondent well, you might have to explain who you are and that you are coaching a particular coachee.

When you have the discussion, **collecting feedback in a logical fashion** will ensure that you don't miss anything:

- Re-introduce yourself and again briefly **explain the purpose and importance** of collecting feedback.
- Ask whether the respondent is happy to go 'on the record' or not. Many people would rather not give negative feedback for fear of reprisal. Giving respondents the **opportunity to be quoted anonymously** may encourage them to be more honest. If they would prefer not to be named, ensure that any comments are disguised when you give the feedback to the coachee.
- Start asking questions about **strengths** first. Remember to ask for **specific examples and evidence**. So if a respondent says 'Her work was good', you should be asking, 'What exactly was good about it?'
- Then ask about areas for **improvement**. Again, to be useful to the coachee, rather than simply accepting that 'His presentations weren't very good', you could ask 'Why weren't they very good?'
- You could also ask for **suggestions** as to how the coachee might improve. When reporting these to the coachee, make sure that you mention that these were suggestions from respondents rather than from you.
- At the end of the discussion, remember to **thank the respondent** and tell them when you will be giving the feedback to the coachee.

When you are talking to respondents, you may find that they struggle to come up with strengths or weaknesses. Although the following list is far from comprehensive, you could try prompting them in areas such as:

- Handling customers or clients.
- Dealing with junior staff/peers/bosses.
- Level of motivation, initiative and hard work.
- Time management, planning and organisation skills.
- Oral communication including presentation and public speaking skills.
- Computing, numeracy and writing skills.
- Ability to work under pressure and handle stress.
- Attention to detail.

Once you have collected all the feedback, collate a report – even if it is just some written notes for yourself. However, many coachees like to have something that they can take away and think about, so it can be helpful to type up just a few bullet points summarising their main strengths and areas for improvement.

When you are putting together the report, remember which respondents said they would prefer not to have their name attributed to specific comments.

4

GIVING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

The truth can hurt! We have already discussed the topic of demonstrating **empathy** – and there are few occasions when it will be more important than when giving negative feedback.

If you sense that the negative feedback goes very much against what the coachee honestly believes about themselves, you may need to handle the situation with **additional sensitivity**. Put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine how you would feel if you were going to be told what you are about to tell your coachee.

Give your coachee time to take in and reflect on negative feedback – it could be a good idea at this point to make a tea or coffee!

⑤ GIVING POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Congratulating good performance is just as important as identifying where people are going wrong. Receiving only negative feedback can be very demoralising. A demoralised coachee will switch off and refuse to listen, or even decide not to take part in any more coaching to protect their feelings.

Everyone is good at something. Try to balance negative feedback with some positive feedback.

Be careful not to overdo it by giving too much positive feedback though; it's like eating too much chocolate – you can easily lose your appetite for it very quickly. Also **watch the tone of your voice** – it can be easy to come across as patronising or insincere if you are not careful.

⑥ ELICITING REACTIONS TO FEEDBACK

Give your coachee **a chance to respond** to what other people have said about them. Suitable questions could include:

- 'How do you feel about the feedback?'

- ‘Do you think the feedback is fair?’
- ‘Are there any comments that shocked you? What are they?’
- ‘Are there any pleasant surprises in what people said about you? What are they?’

Where the feedback is very critical of a coachee, they could react in a number of different ways. For example:

- People can become **defensive**, using phrases such as ‘It wasn’t my fault because . . .’ or ‘I’m not the only person to do it though – no one else in the department is any better.’ The way to coach someone through negative feedback is to focus on why people might have a particular perception. You could ask ‘Why do you think people said that about you then?’
- A common response might be for people to become very **angry** and respond that ‘Someone has an axe to grind’ or ‘They’ve got it in for me.’

Some people might even go on the attack, criticising you: ‘How can you sit there telling me this when you’re just as bad?’ As a coach, your role may be to let your coachee get their feelings and anger out in the open. Once someone has calmed down, they are much more likely to be able to talk rationally about how to move forwards and improve.

It can also be easy for coachees to get hung up on the exact words that are used to describe them. Try to make them think about the **underlying meaning** of particular comments rather than the exact words used.

Kate couldn't understand why one respondent described her as 'patronising'. I asked her why people might find her patronising and suggested that she think about what the respondent was trying to get at, rather than focus only on the word.



MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

- ✓ Think carefully about how you are going to deliver feedback to make the greatest impact on the coachee.
- ✓ Don't pick respondents on your own – work with your coachee to choose them together.
- ✓ Gather feedback from about six people from both within and outside the organisation. This gives you different glimpses of how the coachee is thought of.
- ✓ Be sensitive and empathetic when giving negative feedback – no one finds it easy to hear bad things about themselves.
- ✓ Don't overdo positive feedback. Too much good news loses its impact.
- ✓ Give the coachee an opportunity to react to the feedback. Allow a coachee to express emotions before you move on to the next step, which is to generate options and plan for how to change.

6 Making Changes

*All the talk in the world is useless unless
you also plan to act upon it.*

6

things that
really matter

- 1 GENERATING IDEAS AND MAKING CHOICES
- 2 PROVIDING RESOURCES
- 3 AGREEING TARGETS
- 4 OVERCOMING OBSTACLES
- 5 HELPING PEOPLE TO LEARN
- 6 CHECKING PROGRESS AND CELEBRATING SUCCESS

In Chapter 4 you learned how to help a coachee set an overall goal. The next stage is to think about the **steps to take to achieve that overall goal**. It's time to decide how to change for the better.

However, your job doesn't end with sending a coachee away to work towards their goal in isolation. You have to be there to offer **ongoing support** – both in the form of encouragement as well as physical resources – to help your coachee. When tricky situations arise, you may find that **role-playing** becomes a useful tool to help build a coachee's confidence and skills.

Then, hopefully, it will be not only your job, but also a pleasure, to celebrate your coachee's achievements.

IS THIS YOU?



● *Ruth wants to improve how she delegates work – how can I help her do it?* ● *I find it difficult to figure out how much help to give my coachees outside of our coaching meetings.* ● *My coachee has decided that his goal is to get promoted by next January, but how can we achieve it?* ● *My coachee finds it a struggle to come up with ideas on how to tackle the problems of how his colleagues perceive him.* ● *How can I keep an eye on how my coachee is doing without seeming to be checking up on her?* ● *I'd like to find a way of helping my coachees practise skills in our coaching meetings.* ● *He did it – Harry got his promotion! So what's next?* ● *I don't know how much help I should give my coachee to reach her goal.*



GENERATING IDEAS AND MAKING CHOICES

Now that you have established what your coachee wants and how they are performing at the moment, you need to figure out what **options** are available for improving performance. Invite suggestions and ideas from the coachee as to what **actions** they could take.

Useful questions to get the discussion going include:

- 'What are you going to do to improve on your areas for development?'
- 'What could you do to improve how other people see you?'
- 'When you have faced similar tricky situations, how have you dealt with them in the past?'
- 'There are lots of things we could work on. What do you think some possible actions might be?'

At this stage, focus on thinking creatively to come up with lots of actions – don't worry for the moment whether a particular idea is practicable or not.

If you would like to contribute ideas, get the **coachee's permission** to add your thoughts – otherwise you risk telling rather than coaching.

However, coaching is not just about working on areas for development. If a coachee has particular strengths, make sure they understand the importance of also continuing to do what they are doing well.

Once you have generated a number of actions, choose which ones to do. You can't expect a coachee to do everything at once. So the next step is to **choose actions that will have the greatest effect with as little time and effort as possible.**

Peter came up with lots of ideas on how to better motivate his team. Ideas included: 'Give team briefings once a day,' 'Offer a worker of the week prize,' and 'Coach all four of them individually.' Now we need to choose the most appropriate actions.

One way of doing this could be to examine how much time and effort would be required to get a benefit:

- Write out the full list of actions on a blank piece of paper.
- Work with the coachee to identify the actions that will have the greatest benefits.
- Next, help the coachee to think through which of the actions will take the least time, effort or cost.

In order to identify which to do first:

- Identify the **quick wins** – actions that should achieve the greatest benefits with the least effort, time or other cost. These are the most important ideas that you should work on first.
- Then identify the **slow grow** areas – the actions that will also make a big difference to the performance of your coachee, but may require more time and effort, or are more difficult to achieve. These are the second most important actions to work on.
- Don't worry about the rest of the list for the moment. Refer back to it when you've worked on some of the quick wins and slow grows first.

Peter decided that giving a ten-minute management briefing each day was a quick win for him to work on immediately. Coaching each person individually would take up much more time, so we decided to leave that slow grow area for another time. Offering a worker of the week prize would be quite expensive so we decided to leave that idea for later.

Remember that you are coaching, not telling. So there are no right answers as to what the coachee should or should not do. Your job is to **get a coachee to commit** to doing something to improve himself or herself.



PROVIDING RESOURCES

Your role doesn't end when you have helped a coachee to produce a list of actions. It's now your job to help the coachee achieve them.

Resources could include some of the following:

- **Books and materials.** Some people prefer to learn by reading at their own pace rather than only talking about

it. If this is the case, you might want to research some books or book chapters that will support what you discuss in coaching sessions.

- **Training courses.** There may be specific training needs that only a specialist can help with. For example, you may not speak a foreign language that a coachee wants to learn.
- **Other colleagues.** Other people can have knowledge or expertise that you lack. For example, someone else may be better at explaining the essentials of cost accounting. Encourage coachees to get in touch with other experts directly so that they feel a greater sense of personal responsibility in their own development.
- **Time off.** Sometimes a coachee may need a few hours away from the day-to-day pressures of work to learn or practise something. Even if you are not a coachee's direct boss, you could still ask the boss to give them some time off. If you explain what you have been trying to do, many bosses should be quite amenable.

Resist the temptation to tell a coachee to use a particular resource. As a coach, you must ask your coachee whether he or she would like the resources that you are offering.

③

AGREEING TARGETS

Once you and the coachee have together agreed on a manageable number of actions, it might help to flesh them out, starting with the quick wins. For example, one idea from the example was for Peter to give a team briefing once a day. But such a vague suggestion can be open to all sorts of interpretations and a coachee could just make a half-hearted effort and later claim to have achieved it.

It might help to create a written **action plan** in order to agree some targets. All this involves is **breaking down each action** into the following components:

- 'What exactly are you promising to do?'
- 'When are you going to start doing this?'
- 'When are you going to do it by?'
- 'Who else might be involved in helping you?'
- 'What will it look like if you succeed in doing this? Or what will the effect be if you are successful in achieving this?'

Make a note of the answers to each of the five questions in relation to each idea so that you can refer back to them in later coaching sessions to measure progress.

Peter agreed to spend 20 minutes at the end of each day preparing notes and an agenda to give to a briefing meeting at 9 every morning to his team, starting immediately from Monday. He believes that having a more informed team will keep them more motivated.

④

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Having identified how the coachee will improve their performance, think of the **obstacles or barriers** that might stop them. Making changes is never easy, and there is always a risk that even a small set-back could discourage a coachee from making a change successfully. Talking about potential obstacles will help to prepare a coachee for minor disappointments.

For each of your actions you could, for example, ask:

- 'What could act as an obstacle to achieving your goal?'
- 'How will you overcome these obstacles?'

Peter identified that the biggest obstacle to running the team briefings was his lack of experience in preparing them. So we agreed that he would get help from a senior manager for a few weeks initially.

If a coachee struggles, try to understand whether any of the following might be true:

- Is it a problem relating to a **lack of ability or skill** or just a **lack of confidence**?
- Are there **other people** who might (either intentionally or inadvertently) prevent the coachee from achieving his or her aims?
- Are there **situational factors** (e.g. workload, inadequate resources) that might get in the way?

Once you have isolated where the problem lies, you can think of more specific new steps.

⑤ HELPING PEOPLE TO LEARN

Coaching sessions are not always only about asking the right questions. There are times when it may be a good use of your time to actually **work through issues** with a coachee.

One particular technique that can be very useful is **role-playing**. You could, for instance, use it to replay a past situation that a coachee did not handle very well. Or you could use it to prepare for a situation that the coachee knows he or she will have to deal with in the near future.

After all, you don't learn to swim or to play the piano just by reading or talking about it – **skills need practice**.

Bill is worried about having to give an appraisal to Sarah next week, so we decided that I would role-play Sarah so that he could practise giving the appraisal.

If you decide to use role-playing, it might help to:

- Decide what situation you and the coachee will role-play in a later session. You need to give the coachee time to prepare the role-playing scenario.
- Discuss how you should play the role to help the coachee.
- Then do the role-play – but don't be too tough on your coachee! After all, the idea is to build both skills and confidence.
- Finally discuss how it went and use questions to draw out the learning from the role-play.



CHECKING PROGRESS AND CELEBRATING SUCCESS

Coaching doesn't stop when you leave a formal coaching session – it's part of your responsibility to provide ongoing **emotional support and encouragement**. And sometimes you may have to act as your coachee's **conscience by politely reminding** them about any actions the two of you had agreed. This could be as simple as passing a coachee in the corridor and asking, 'How's it going?'

While the first few coaching sessions may be primarily concerned with assessing a coachee's capability and deciding on changes to make, later sessions should increasingly focus on **measuring progress**. If the actions that you agreed upon are proving too difficult to achieve, you might want to scale them back a little. If things are going well and your coachee is making good progress, you

might want to choose further actions to flesh out in more detail.

The following are some useful phrases for checking how things are going:

- ‘How are we getting on with . . .?’
- ‘What seems to be working for you?’
- ‘What have we learnt so far?’
- ‘Why do you think that isn’t working?’

One of the most motivating things in the world is to receive **unconditional praise**. Unfortunately, a lot of the praise that people give is followed by that pernicious little word ‘but’. For example, someone might say ‘That was great work, but next time could you . . .’. If you believe that a coachee has done a good job, try offering unmitigated praise and watch your coachee’s face light up!

After a number of months, **repeat the feedback exercise** detailed in Chapter 5. If you wrote a report when you first gathered feedback, it will be very easy for you to compare how the coachee is currently doing with how they did in the past. Hopefully, at this stage both you and the respondents will have seen some positive changes in the coachee’s behaviour.

Eventually, it will make sense for you to **conclude the coaching relationship**. For example, a coachee may have achieved their long-term goal and there may be other people who need coaching more. In your final session try to:

- Explain why you feel that the coaching needs to come to an end.

- Review the entire coaching relationship. What were the key lessons that the coachee learnt? What went particularly well? What went less well?
- Get some feedback on your performance as a coach.
- Encourage the coachee to apply the principles of coaching on his or her own. Why not get them to set another long-term goal and think about the actions and obstacles that will help and hinder reaching that goal?



MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

- ✓ Think of the steps that your coachee should take to achieve their long-term goal. Then decide which actions will have the biggest positive impact on performance with the least energy or wasted time. A coachee can only undertake to make a few changes at a time.
- ✓ Back your coachee up. Resources can take the form of training courses, funding, a book or even just some time off.
- ✓ Help your coachee to turn actions into a concrete action plan that describes exactly how and when he or she will achieve each action.
- ✓ Identify the obstacles that might prevent your coachee from achieving each action, then think about the further actions that will overcome those obstacles.
- ✓ Use role-playing as a tool to replay or prepare for all sorts of situations. In the safe environment of a coaching relationship, it is a surprisingly powerful tool.
- ✓ Provide ongoing support and encouragement. And don't forget to measure and celebrate success – there's nothing more motivating than for a coachee to realise that they have achieved a particular goal.

7 Developing Your Coaching Skills

The best coach in the world is the one who realises there is still a lot to learn.

4

things that
really matter

- 1 REVIEWING YOUR COACHING PERFORMANCE
- 2 AVOIDING PITFALLS
- 3 COACHING ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS
- 4 DEVELOPING YOURSELF

If you follow the guidelines set out in the previous chapters, you will be able to make a very good go at coaching. However, to become a great coach you need to **appraise your own performance** and think about what you do well and what you could improve. Being aware of some of the common traps that many other coaches fall into will help too.

No matter how long you have been coaching for, be careful not to think that you've 'made it'. Apply the principles of coaching to yourself – **keep reviewing your performance and developing yourself**. And if you are coaching people and getting feedback on them, shouldn't you also have a coach and have feedback collected on you?

Coaching isn't just something you do some of the time but not others – it's a way of living your life.

IS THIS YOU?



● *We have had a few coaching sessions but don't seem to have made any progress.* ● *I'm not sure if I'm teaching or really coaching.* ● *I think I'm a pretty good coach, but how can I get better?* ● *One of my colleagues who doesn't want to be coached treats her staff terribly – I think I need to do something about it.* ● *My boss really is bad at her job – is there no way I can coach her?* ● *I want to learn more about coaching skills.* ● *One of the teams that I work on just doesn't seem to get anywhere but I don't know whether it would be appropriate or not for me to coach it along.* ● *Do I need a coach for myself?*



REVIEWING YOUR COACHING PERFORMANCE

In order to be a good coach, you need to keep asking yourself: are you doing as good a job as you possibly can?

After each session you have with a coachee, take just a few minutes to consider:

- Did you make progress over the course of the session? Why?
- What did the coachee get out of the session?
- Was there anything that you felt, in retrospect, that you should have done during the session? If there was, don't worry – do it next time, but in the meantime learn from your experience.
- What lessons can you take away to apply with other coachees?

Review your performance to revitalise and renew your coaching sessions.

② AVOIDING PITFALLS

There are some traps that coaches can, on occasion, fall into. Knowing that they *can* happen will help you to avoid them.

It's worth mentioning again that **teaching rather than coaching** is a common pitfall. You might be talking *at* your coachee rather than talking *with* them if you can answer yes to one or more of the following:

- Do you find yourself talking for more than about half of each session?
- Do you often find yourself interrupting your coachee to say something more important?
- Do you set the agenda for each meeting? (You should be allowing the coachee to lead the pace at which you work together.)
- Do you ever use phrases such as 'You're wrong', 'I think you should . . . '?

If you do find yourself teaching rather than coaching, look back at Chapter 3 which covers the skills of questioning and listening. Then explain to your coachee that you might have been doing too much of the talking. Finally, encourage your coachee to tell you when they think you have been talking too much!

You should never ASSUME, because it will make an ASS out of U and ME!

Another common trap is to **move the discussion on too quickly or too slowly** for the coachee. For example, you may think that a particular coachee is very bright and you want them to achieve as quickly as possible – but they may want to spend a lot of time choosing the right long-term

goal before moving on. The opposite can also happen too – that you are moving too slowly and inadvertently patronising a coachee. Again, questions provide the solution. Try asking questions such as:

- ‘Are we moving at the right pace?’
- ‘Would you feel comfortable if we moved on to the next step now?’

It can be easy to get frustrated with a coachee when you seem to be seeing **no visible signs of progress**. In such a situation:

- Review whether your coachee’s long-term goal is still appropriate. Is it too difficult? Have circumstances changed? If the goal is no longer appropriate, you may need to set a new long-term goal together.
- Re-assess the quick win actions that have been agreed. Are these still appropriate and achievable? Then look at them to identify what might be stopping your coachee from achieving each one and ways of overcoming those difficulties.
- Ask yourself whether you are offering enough resources and support outside the coaching sessions. Have you built up sufficient rapport with your coachee? Is the coachee at all intimidated by your authority or status?
- Above all, avoid showing any frustration or anger at the lack of progress.



COACHING ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS

Many of the skills of coaching are vital for dealing with people on a day-to-day basis at work. You don’t have to wait

until you have a formal coaching session to listen, give feedback and help others to do their jobs better.

Sometimes, if you wait until a formal coaching session to offer feedback, the details of a particular incident may have become blurred by the passing of time. Or you might just forget to bring it up if you wait. So if you observe an example of behaviour that deserves comment – good or bad – **try to let the coachee know as soon as possible**. Be careful not to embarrass them in front of other colleagues though.

Praise publicly but criticise privately.

Your **boss** and other **people more senior** than you may also need some guidance, but you must apply your skills in a more subtle fashion because it's unlikely that they will agree to being formally coached by you. However, you can offer useful feedback following the principles of giving good positive and good negative feedback. In addition to the usual guidelines, try to:

- Choose an appropriate moment – if you embarrass your boss in front of the people who work for them, you can bet that you'll regret it later!
- Show greater deference – for example, ask for some feedback on your performance before giving your feedback on them. And if your boss declines the feedback, just save it for another, better occasion.

The skills of coaching come in to play when you work with a **team** too. You don't have to stand up and announce that you are coaching the team – just do it! Applying your coaching skills in a team situation will help that team

become a lot more effective. In team meetings, you could use your skills to:

- Ask the team what its goals are and what actions it will take to achieve its goals.
- Get the group to think about obstacles and ways of overcoming them.
- Challenge negative assumptions that the group may have about itself.

④

DEVELOPING YOURSELF

Coaches who say ‘Do as I say, not as I do’ will eventually lose credibility. So to be a great coach you have to **walk the talk**.

First **set yourself a long-term goal**. Then think about:

- The short-term actions you will have to take.
- The obstacles you will have to overcome.
- Your own measures of success.

Secondly, **find a coach for yourself**. Ask someone who has some of the qualities outlined in Chapter 1. Above all, be open-minded and listen to what they have to say.

Also **ask for feedback** from all the people you work with and receive it graciously. The following tips may help you to encourage people to give you honest feedback:

- **Explain** that any feedback a person gives you will help you to develop.
- Make sure that you **act upon any feedback** and at a later date demonstrate to whoever gave you the feedback that you tried to act upon it.
- If you don’t agree with feedback, do challenge – but make sure that you **avoid being defensive**.

- Show your appreciation and **thank people** for giving you feedback.

Practise what you preach

Keep up-to-date with new coaching resources. There are always new books being published. Borrow a book from a library, get your organisation to invest in a copy or buy one for yourself. Check magazines and journals for articles on coaching or search the Internet for resources. Never stop learning!



MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

- ✓ Keep assessing how good you are as a coach.
- ✓ Be careful not to fall into some of the common traps that can make you a less effective coach. Beware of teaching rather than coaching, making no progress, or moving at the wrong pace.
- ✓ Use the skills of coaching to develop people – including your boss – in their daily work. Remember to question and listen first before you offer to give feedback. And when you do give feedback, keep in mind the impact that it can have on people and demonstrate suitable empathy and understanding.
- ✓ Keep learning and growing as a coach. Use all the resources you can. And find someone you trust to coach you. If it's good enough for your coachees, it has to be good enough for you.