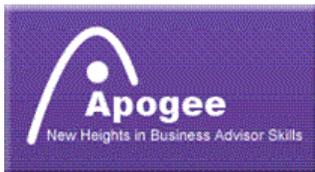




The Manager's Guide to Coaching

Peter Hill

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The Managers guide to Coaching

For many years now organisations have been trying to get their managers to behave more like leaders. Training courses have allowed delegates to debate the respective merits of past leaders, various situations and the relative benefits of each. Maslow and MacGregor have been called in to add weight to the motivational arguments and indeed Herzberg and his research at the Bethlehem steel plant has been thrown into the pot for good measure.

But one question still remains – ‘how do you get managers not only to learn the theory but also apply it in practice?’ There needs to be some way of allowing managers to engage in a meaningful objective dialogue with their staff that has a lasting effect.

Over the past 15 years, one of the best ways we have seen this meaningful dialogue take place is through coaching conversations. Indeed, in the field of management there are many tools and opportunities for these conversations to happen. Take a look at the following list:

- Appraisal interviews
- On the job training
- Problem solving
- Project management
- Quality initiatives
- Performance Management
- Acting in absence (Whist your Manager is on leave)
- Succession planning
- Director Development

All of these arenas have been used by our clients as opportunities for coaching to take place. Furthermore, the following list gives some idea of the management tools or company policies that managers have used effectively during these conversations:

- Team Briefings
- Dress Code Policy
- Disciplinary procedures
- Standards of Performance
- Operating Procedures
- Alcohol Policies
- Diversity Policies
- Legislative briefings

The keys to their approaches have unlocked doors about their own performance on two fronts. The first key is understanding that each manager has cultural attributes that are attached to him or her. These are usually around their style as a leader, the respect they command, the trust others have in them, their past behaviour and their competence.

The second key is that as each manager moves up the career ladder, their coaching takes on a different approach. So a Team Leader’s approach to coaching is different to that of a middle manager and that would be different to the approach that a director might take.

Part of this is down to the challenges that each respective level of management faces, from the day-to-day activities to the strategic planning that is needed in the world of work today.

It is worth looking at both of these keys in more detail as many of the examples of best practice in coaching can and will improve your performance as a manager.

In the first area of cultural attributes, good contracting can assist in all dialogues starting of with a “clean sheet”. It is a way of setting the ground rules for the conversation in terms of outcomes, expectations, and personal style – e.g. a directive vs. a non-directive approach. It is this last one which is particularly important. Many employees who have a problem, approach their manager with the expectation that their manager will give them a solution. This is partly because that is what has always happened in the past. If you are about to change your style and not give solutions, but ask questions that will raise the employees awareness of the problem so they can find a solution themselves, it would be wise to let them know of your new style in advance.

Although the word “contract” sounds very formal, I have one client whose contracting consists of “What exactly do you need of me?” and they have found that this has saved them time and effort in so many different ways, not least of all is that their employee had the solution all along. But because the employee answered their contracting question above with the response – “Nothing really, I just need you to listen” it stopped my client going into “solution mode”, something they habitually did.

Five Indicators of Good Contracting.

- 1. Clarify your employee’s expectations – find out what they want from you.**
- 2. Explain your style (Directive vs. Non directive – you will be asking lots of questions to check your understanding and raise their awareness)**
- 3. Make time to listen from the outset – now is not the time to demonstrate your ability to multi – task!**
- 4. Highlight any actions – who will be doing them and by when?**
- 5. Keep any promises and commitments you make – if you break them, the trust will be broken between you and your employee**

Another area that can assist in your “managerial cultural attributes” is developing a good track record as a coach. This is not difficult. Taking time to listen to people – making them feel as though they are the most important person to you at the time you are coaching them – will earn their respect. Giving honest and valuable feedback will also earn their respect. Keep in mind that for feedback to work it has to be useful. In other words, it has to be full of use! Your employees will want to use it. How likely is this if

the way you deliver feedback upsets and angers people to the point where they are argumentative or overly defensive? Many of our clients have found it best to have a framework for giving feedback. They have also found it best to have a balanced approach to feedback, focussing on the actions and subsequent impact of them. One common denominator in best practice of giving feedback is to ask, “What were you trying to achieve?” at the outset of any coaching/feedback dialogue.

A.I.D. – A focussed Model for giving feedback

First ask - “What were you trying to achieve?”

- **A – Action** - “What actually happened?”
- **I – Impact** - “What was the impact?” (On what and on whom)
- **D – Do** - “Do you need to do anything about it?” (In relation to current targets, service level agreements, relationship building, training needs, building on success, putting things right, etc.)

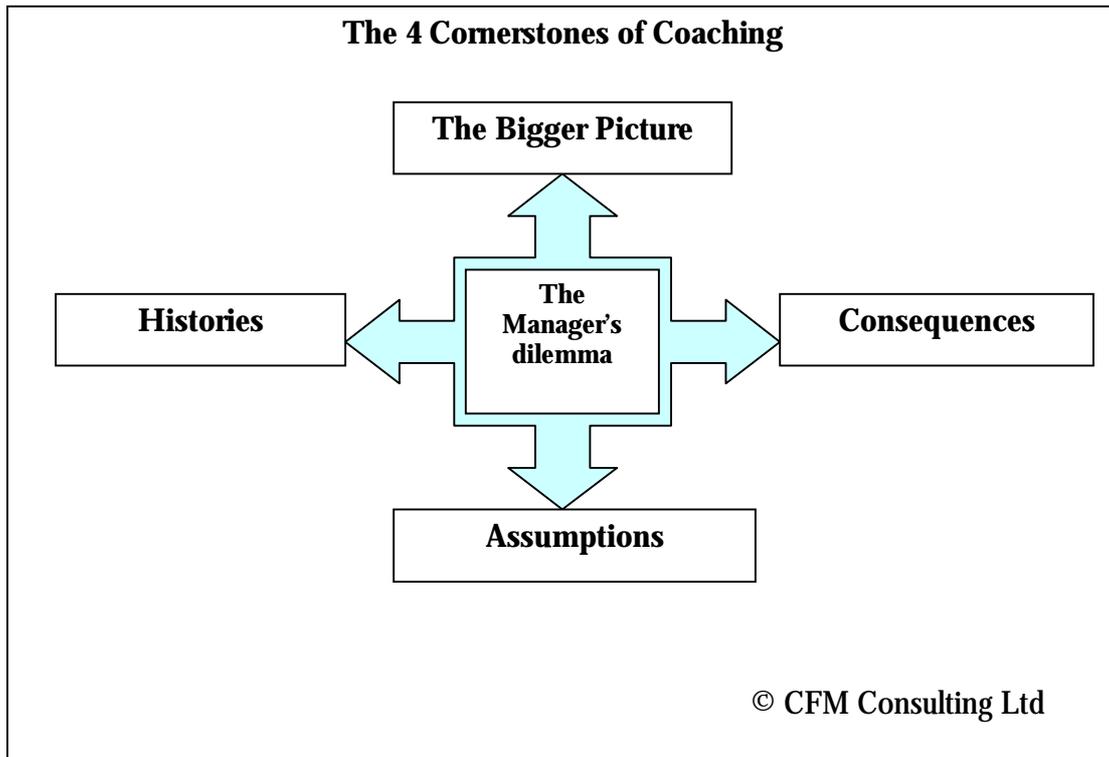
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The model above is useful in working with feedback with staff and the third point – the “Do” gives a good example of how as coach you can make good use of managerial policies and standards.

Moving onto the second key, different levels of management require the manager to adopt different styles of coaching.

At the team leader level, coaching is far more aligned to “traditional coaching”. A team leader coaches at an operational level, very often coming from a background where they themselves were once the experts in. The danger here is that the manager finds it all too easy to “do the job” for their member of staff. “Traditional coaching” requires the coach to know the subject. It is at this level that good quality development of coaches to a competent level is critical, as future progression builds upon this foundation. ILM’s Coaching and Mentoring level 3 qualification is aimed at doing just that.

At the middle manager level, a different approach is required from the manager as a coach. At this level the manager is responsible for developing other managers and facilitating innovation and problem solving. This is very often referred to as “transitional coaching” because a manager is usually coaching a person from one level of management to another and for this the coach does not need to know the subject area. It requires the skills of asking questions and making statements that raise awareness. One of the best ways of doing this is to use a model called the “4 Cornerstones of Coaching”. This model allows the coach to develop four key areas in which to “couch their questions”.



In this model the manager can target action-orientated questions at his or her managers in the four key areas. For example:-

Histories: -

- What have you done in the past with a similar dilemma?
- What has worked before?
- Who solved the dilemma the last time it happened?
- What does the procedures manual say about this type of dilemma?

The Bigger Picture: -

- How would a customer view this dilemma?
- If you were to describe this to another department, what would their take on the dilemma be?
- How would your previous company have dealt with this type of dilemma?
- If you were the department director, what would you want to happen in this situation?

Consequences: -

- If this dilemma is not solved what would the consequences be? (You can mix this with the “Big Picture Questions” by adding “on sales/customer service/ budget, etc.)

- If this dilemma was solved by close of business tonight what would the consequences be?
- What are the personal consequences to you if the dilemma is solved?
- What were the consequences the last time this dilemma happened?

Assumptions: -

- What assumptions do we need to make to move forward on this? (An answer of “none” tells you that some assumptions have already been made!)
- What assumptions have you made already?
- What are the basic facts of the dilemma?
- What assumptions am I (as a coach) making of either the dilemma or the person I am coaching?

It is easy to see how this tool can assist a manager in transit by raising their awareness not only on the dilemma they are facing, but also how they can be groomed for promotion. The ILM level 4 Diploma in Coaching and Mentoring is a good knowledge base for Transitional Coaching.

The Level 5 Executive Diploma in Coaching & Mentoring from ILM is aimed, as one would expect, at the more strategic level and works with “Transformational Coaching”. As with most strategies, it is concerned with a much “broader canvass” so from a business point of view it looks at the current profile of the business - products/services, geographics, recent growth, market share, organisational structure, return on investment, organisational structure, internal and external variables (usually a SWOT/PEST analysis), the businesses driving force, product/service driven eg McDonalds, market user driven eg, BMW, Procter & Gamble, production capacity driven eg Highland Spring Mineral Water. There are other driving forces but these are just a few of them.

A transformational coach usually knows nothing about the topic in which they are coaching, but knows how to coach very effectively. By using a combination of very skilful questioning techniques, empathy, reflective statements, listening for opportunities and challenging the status quo, they can facilitate a *breakthrough* in either personal or corporate development by *breaking with* tradition.

It is worth mentioning the benefits that can be gained by the organisation, the manager as a coach and the client – the person being coached. Our clients have cited the following over the past five years.

The Organisation

- “Improved Succession planning by identifying potential earlier”
- “Promotes innovation and creativity”
- “When used with training programmes, facilitates quicker transfer of learning back to the workplace”
- “Improves communication and breaks down a “silo mentality”
- “When focussed, gives a very good return on investment”

The Manager as a Coach

- “Increased job satisfaction”
- “Frees up my time”
- “Is useful as part of my development”
- “Improves communication in a proactive way – we now spend less time sorting out problems”
- “Keeps me in touch with what is going on”

The Client – The person being coached

- “It is a more adult way of being managed”
- “Helps me think for myself”
- “Allows me to see things from a different perspective”
- “Builds my confidence”
- “It gives me skills for life, not just work”

It would be easy to jump to the conclusion that coaching can be a “fix all” solution in the world of leadership, just as it would be to jump to the conclusion that coaching is all non-directive and an easy option. Nothing could be further from the truth. In certain cases, coaching is not an option. As mentioned before all companies have policies and procedures and these should be followed first and foremost. For example, if you start to coach in the middle of a disciplinary process, it will send out mixed messages that will almost certainly backfire on you.

Be warned -there is nothing easy about coaching. It calls for tough conversations, that are very often action orientated and followed up on with due diligence and in some cases, tenacity. It requires shrewd time management and most importantly, as a coach, the ability to manage your own thought processes.

More coaching tools and techniques can be found in the ILM publication “Concepts of Coaching” by Peter Hill and is designed to assist the Manager as a Coach.

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