

What is Coaching Anyway?

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Coaching is a way to create purposeful conversations designed to help leaders and managers expand their capabilities through reflection, planned action, measured risk taking and on-going personal support. All coaching candidates must be interested in growing, changing and excelling in their current job.

Coaching gives people a chance to examine what they are doing in light of their intentions, it is not telling them what to do. Experience tells us coaching helps people attain long-term excellent performance by developing their capabilities for self-correction and accelerated learning.

The Model

The overarching objective of any coaching engagement is to provide opportunities for a leader to develop in the context of organizational needs. While the specific learning objectives for every coaching engagement are different, the following model provides structure for virtually all coaching relationships.

1. Clarify intentions of the individual & organization, discuss alignment and/or gaps
2. Elevate individual awareness, taking into account feedback data if available
3. Explore options for action and analyze risks and benefits
4. Choose most appropriate practices, structures or action steps to bring about change and improvement
5. Observe and measure results over time
6. Identify and label what has been learned in concrete terms

The Coaching Approach to Personal and Professional Development

Coaching approaches vary and are somewhat situational but the examples below demonstrate how a coach, using various types of data, could challenge an individual while remaining non-judgmental.

Using Time Orientation

- Looking at the past: distortions, limiting beliefs, generalizations, old stories
- Looking at the present: acknowledging emotions related to resistance/barriers/obstacles especially anger, fear or sadness
- Examining what the future can be: exploring risks and benefits, recommitting to intention

Using Language, Emotions & Body Alignment

Language use, emotional responses and body alignment all provide openings for feedback and honest discussion about communicating effectively, leading powerfully and noticing the reactive ways in which human beings respond to certain triggers.

Coaches can illuminate blind spots by saying these kinds of things:

- “Here’s what I am seeing as a pattern...”
- “Here’s how I experienced you in that moment... let me act out how I saw you and tell me what you notice”
- “If I were in that person’s shoes, I might think...”
- “Your request was easy to ignore because your voice was soft, your shoulders were slumped and your eyes were downcast...what were you feeling when you made the request?”

Structuring Ways to Practice a New Behavior or Skill

Taking into account the “Rule of 21” that says it takes 21 repetitions to change a habit or embody a new

behavior, a practical approach is to practice/observe, practice/observe, practice/observe moving from easy to increasingly bigger challenges.

In the beginning the coach designs ways to practice a new skill or behavior and facilitates the observation/evaluation process with prompting questions such as:

- What happened?
- What did you do?
- How successful was the action?
- How did you feel before, during and after?
- How did other people react?
- What feedback did you get?
- Do you need to go back and follow up with a clarification?

The goal is for the process to become self-generative, i.e. the individual becomes able to ask these questions of self and design his/her own learning structures and practices, in order to self observe, correct and shift approaches/behaviors without prompting.

Sample learning structures and practices

If the goal is to be more approachable and trusted, a series of structures might include:

- Soliciting five other people's opinions about a decision and following up with them afterward to disclose your decision and why you made it
- Asking one co-worker per week out to lunch to provide opportunity for building personal relationships with peers
- Walking the halls every Tuesday afternoon for the purpose of engaging with staff you seldom see
- Taking weekly notes about how a particularly difficult relationship is progressing
- If the goal is to stop over controlling behavior, practices might include:
 - Holding back opinions in meetings until everyone else has spoken
 - Delegating an important piece of work
 - Learning to use active listening techniques

Using Wisdom Accessing Questions Coaches are trained to ask powerful questions that lead individuals to see what is true and best for them. Examples are:

- What do you need to do to gain support?
- What is stopping you?
- What is just one more possibility?
- What do you need to do to set the tone you described?
- What has gone unsaid that needs to be expressed?
- How will you deal with _____? (a predictable outcome)
- How else could you handle this?
- How do you suppose it will all work out?
- How are you sabotaging yourself?
- If you had free choice in the matter what would you do?

Summary

Coached individuals report feeling more confident and self assured as they step into new or expanded responsibilities because they have learned a powerful method for self evaluation and correction that will serve to accelerate and support their on-going learning.