

Devising a Coaching Programme

Introduction

This checklist describes how to structure a coaching programme and introduces some of the major stages involved. Tips are given on how best to design a coaching session and on the best approach to adopt if coachees are to experience meaningful learning.

The levels of experience and seniority of coaches varies. So, to customise each programme for its recipient(s) coaches also need to consider the ways in which individuals learn, and which learning methods to employ.

National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

- B: Providing direction, units 6, 7
- D: Working with people, units 5, 7

Definition

A coaching programme is a structured series of events aimed at overall performance improvement and increased personal and job satisfaction for an individual or team.

Action checklist

1. Stages to consider when devising a coaching programme:

- Diagnosis and exploration
- Understanding
- Considering learning methods
- Developing an action plan
- Follow up and review

2. Diagnosis and Exploration

With both individuals and teams, you have to make an initial diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses. You may need to consider other opinions, notably those of your coachee(s). Let them decide for themselves their perception of the situation and give them ample opportunity to express their needs. Skills of questioning, listening and observation are key requirements of a good coach.

Another important task here is the setting of goals, which must be **SMART** (S – Specific, M – Measurable, A – Actionable, R – Realistic, T - Time Bound). You should agree both short term and long term goals and the former should be a series of milestones along the route to the achievement of the latter. If the goals are proposed by the coachee, so much the better - try to avoid imposing goals wherever possible.

3. Understanding

At this stage, the job of the coach is to help the coachees fully understand the magnitude of the problem and the size of the challenge. They need to discover for themselves the limitations, demands and implications of what they are about to embark upon. Once your coachees fully understand the situation, you should seek their agreement and commitment to the goals.

This stage will also involve consideration of *how* best to achieve the goals. By utilising your counselling skills, you should help them identify the options for themselves, prioritise them and decide on the best way forward. However, the situation might occur in which you feel they have made the wrong choice. In this case, you as coach should state your opinion and share your experiences.

At the end of this stage, your coachees should understand exactly what they are aiming for, the full implications of their decision, and how they hope to get there.

4. Considering learning methods

When planning the actual content of coaching sessions and the ways it will be imparted to the coachees, it is important to consider how individuals learn, and utilise various learning methods.

Learning occurs whenever one adopts new, or modifies existing, behaviour patterns in a way that has some influence on future performance or attitudes. It is about a change in behaviour that is reasonably permanent and grows out of past experience.

Research indicates that learners retain about

- 10% of what they read
- 20% of what they hear
- 30% of what they see
- 50% of what they both hear and use
- 70% of what they say
- 90% of what they see and do

Though these percentages are only approximations, they do indicate that: -

- Participants learn faster by seeing and hearing than by hearing alone
- Participants learn even faster when doing is added to seeing and hearing

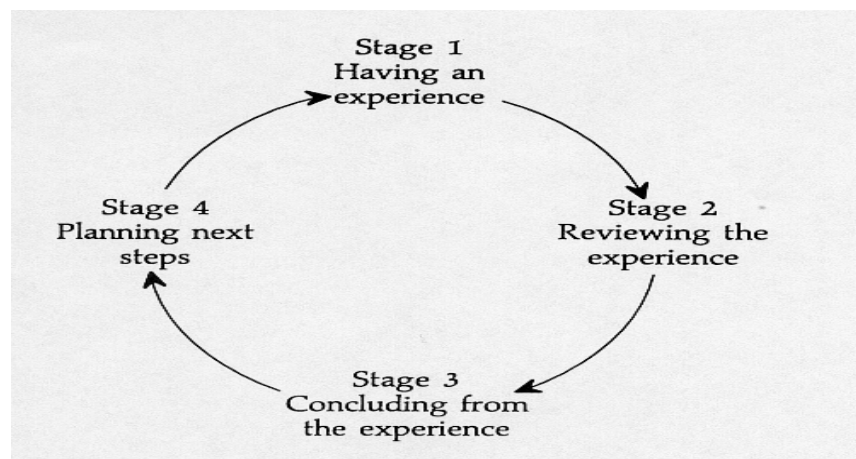
- Participants retain more of the things they do than of the things they are told.

There are two major learning points for coaches/trainers from this research. Firstly, the 'telling' style of coaching/training is largely ineffective. Secondly, effective learning must utilise experience - both the process of the learner actually experiencing something, and the analysis and sharing of a learner's experience for the benefit of all.

Perhaps of all the learning theories that have been developed, the relatively new theory of **Experiential Learning** is the most useful for coaches. This is because it allies experience to analysis to bring about behavioural change. It:

- Puts the emphasis on the actual experiences that people go through as the starting point of the learning process, and
- Emphasises the mental processes that individuals use to analyse the experience, which includes performance, emotions and feelings.

Experiential learning theory was developed in the 1970s by David Kolb who said that learning follows a cycle and that there are four distinct stages in the learning cycle. The cycle was modified in the 1980s by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford, who linked the four stages in the cycle to four individual Learning Styles. Awareness of individual preferences in learning style is an important pre-requisite in learning how to learn. The cycle is shown below.



The cycle begins with an *experience* which could jolt existing views. This is then subject to *reflection* and *observation* to absorb the meaning of the experience. Only after time for reflection – to allow the brain to re-programme itself – should we *conceptualise* or seek to find the general principles which are derived from the initial experience. Lastly, the effective learner enters a stage of *experimenting* to test new knowledge and to see whether it works in practice. Then the cycle begins again with the *implementation* of the new ideas and knowledge.

Some suggestions for implementing this theory are: -

- Get your coachees to complete the Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ). This will help them and you to identify their preferred learning style, as well as identify their strengths and development areas.
- Continually design experiences that are meaningful and use different methods. A variety of coaching methods will take the coachee around the learning cycle many times over, which will reinforce earlier learning.

5. Developing an Action Plan

With appropriate methods of learning in mind, develop an action plan for your series of coaching sessions. Specific steps in a specific time frame are needed, with the coachee having a positive hands-on series of learning opportunities.

Do not try to be overly ambitious in a session. The coachee has to have sufficient time to practice a new skill or improvement and the coach has to observe the progress being made. Consequently, you should set small, achievable tasks and not require your coachee(s) to make quantum leaps which involve a high degree of failure which will only result in demotivation and lack of self-confidence.

In a coaching programme, the early sessions are crucial to success. In these sessions, the goals are defined and the relationship is developed. Once these are in place, progress is much smoother. Keep the focus on one goal at a time and regularly evaluate progress to ensure that you are on course for the final goal. Ensuring steady progress towards the end goal is the responsibility of the coach as you are the one who can stand back and be objective. Also, at each milestone en route, take time out to praise and recognise achievement.

Any effective coaching programme will be subject to constraints. You will be structuring your programme within time limits, and subject to the available resources. Therefore it is vital to set objectives which will make your sessions as effective as possible within the boundaries that are set.

It is important to finish on a positive note so that coachees leave the session with a 'can do' rather than a 'can't do' attitude. Some comment about previous achievements, recognition in the achievement of a milestone, or general contribution to the team is advisable as you are in the business of building self-belief.

6. Follow Up and Review

Like most processes, the final stage leads back into the first stage, but hopefully the second time around you will have learnt from the experience and be much wiser. This final stage involves the following: -

- Finding out what your coachees have learnt and the levels of achievement.
- Evaluating performance, both that of the coachees and your own as coach. You need to both give and receive feedback. You can make use of peers, video footage, the coachee and of course yourself. By skilful questioning you can help your coachee(s) identify for themselves the reasons for either success or failure. For example,
 - What did you/we do well?
 - What did you/we do badly?
 - What needs to change?
 - What have you/we learnt?
- Practice 'positive discontent', i.e. let your coachees be proud of their achievements but never let them be content to 'rest on their laurels.' Look for ways to continually stretch them without being negative. If you have handled the process skilfully, your coachees, flushed with success, will be keen to move forward with the next task.

If time permits, your coachees can practice again and if this is not possible, this could be the starting point for the next session. As coach, you need to stay close to

the situation and observe your coachees in action very soon. "Come back next month and let me know how you got on" is not much good. Offers of help and support demonstrate interest and reinforce commitment on both sides.

Additional resources

Books

Improving employee performance through workplace coaching: a practical guide to performance management

Earl M A Carter and Frank A McMahon
London: Kogan Page, 2005

Making coaching work: creating a coaching culture

David Clutterbuck and David Megginson
London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2005

Coaching that counts: harnessing the power of leadership coaching to deliver strategic value

Dianna L Anderson and Merrill C Anderson
Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann, 2005

Coaching with colleagues: an action guide for one to one learning

Erik de Haan and Yvonne Burger
Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005

The coachs coach: personal development for personal developers

Alison Hardingham
London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2004

The seven cs of coaching: the definitive guide to collaborative coaching

Mick Cope
Harlow: Prentice Hall Business, 2004

Coaching for change: practical strategies for transforming performance

Kaye Thorne
London: Kogan Page, 2004

The art and practice of leadership coaching: 50 top executive coaches reveal their secrets

Howard Morgan, Phil Harkins and Marshall Goldsmith eds
Hoboken NJ: John Wiley, 2004

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from the Management Information Centre. More information at: www.managers.org.uk/mic

Related checklists

Coaching for better performance (089)
Giving feedback as a coach (222)
Giving criticism as a coach (223)

Organisations

The Association for Coaching

66 Church Road

London W7 1LB

United Kingdom

E-mail: enquiries@associationforcoaching.com

Web: www.associationforcoaching.com

The AC is an independent non profit organisation with the goal to promote best practice, raise awareness and standards across the Coaching industry, while providing value added benefits to its members – whether they are professional Coaches or Organisations involved in Coaching.

The International Coach Federation

UK ICF

P.O. Box 2872

Tipton

DY4 0YW

United Kingdom

Telephone: 0870 751 8823

Email: info@coachfederation.org.uk

Web: www.coachfederation.org.uk

The professional association for personal and business coaches worldwide with over 7500 members in nearly 30 countries, and nearly 650 members in the UK.

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