

# Coaching for Better Performance

## Introduction

Coaching has become increasingly popular as a tool for developing employee potential and work performance. In fact, survey evidence shows that between 60 and 80 percent of organisations are now using coaching methods.

When used appropriately, coaching can be a cost-effective approach to development, focusing on specific individuals and their identified development needs. Its development of existing employees' skills, can eliminate the need to recruit new employees, and improve motivation, leading to a reduction in staff turnover. Coaching sends a positive message to employees about how the organisation values its staff, and creates a sense of achievement for both those acting as coaches and those receiving support from a coach.

Coaching is most effective when used as one of a range of learning and training activities. It may be used to reinforce and help learners to apply theoretical knowledge-based learning acquired from more formal training methods. It can be carried out by external, professional coaches or internal coaches who could be line managers, colleagues or members of the HR department. This checklist focuses on the latter, i.e. internal coaches, and provides guidance on conducting a coaching session.

It is important to bear in mind that coaching involves one to one relationships that require considerable time and effort. Those providing coaching will themselves need training, supervision and support.

## National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance to the following standards:  
D: Working with people, unit 7

## Definition

Coaching is a method of helping people to develop their skills and knowledge through a one to one relationship with a coach, (often a more senior or experienced colleague) who provides guidance and support through a range of work-based activities. The coach works with the learner to identify where they could develop new skills, either for

their current job or for the future, and provides support and encouragement to help them in achieving their aims. Coaching is essentially non-directive, with the emphasis on helping people to learn, rather than teaching them and on allowing them to try things out for themselves.

Coaching differs from mentoring in that it deals with specific tasks and skills that can be mastered and measured; mentoring is more about longer-term development or progress within an organisation.

Coaches need excellent interpersonal skills including:

- a caring, patient and supportive approach
- an awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses
- good verbal and non-verbal communication
- good listening and questioning skills
- the ability to observe and make accurate assessments.

## **Action checklist**

### **1. Plan your approach before starting the session**

Hold a preliminary meeting with the learner to establish ground rules.

- Identify the learning needs which the coaching sessions will aim to address, and agree on priorities.
- Set learning objectives - these should be clearly set out (for example 'By X date you will be able to explain/demonstrate how to do YZ').
- Agree success criteria, or task objectives, between the coach and the learner, specifying the standard against which success will be judged. These criteria should be defined, agreed and understood: 'By the end you will be able to weld two pieces of pipe to industry standard tolerances'.
- Review the options and make a detailed plan. Decide on the practicalities: the number and length of sessions to be carried out, location and preferred times of day.

### **2. Establish the most appropriate approach to learning**

We all learn in different ways. For coaching to be effective, it is essential to understand what will best meet the needs of the learner. Explore and test a mixture of methods, including watching, listening, thinking, reading, observing, reflecting or trying things out, to find the approach which gives the best results for your learners, or the combination which seems most suitable.

### **3. Identify opportunities for coaching**

In coaching, it is important for the learner to try skills out in an actual work setting, so it will be necessary identify a suitable occasion for the coaching session. Taking into consideration the priorities that have been identified, set a suitable time for the first session.

### **4. Carry out the coaching session**

Bearing in mind the preferred learning styles identified earlier:

- give a clear and easy-to-follow demonstration, whilst explaining to the learner the detail of what is happening and why

- watch for signs that the learner may have missed something - for example, by observing body language or asking questions
- build in summaries and reviews at appropriate points, to ensure the learner grasps the key points
- let the learner try the task out for themselves, with accompanying support and reminders if needed
- provide the encouragement that all learners need and deserve when they are doing well.

## **5. Review progress and provide feedback**

Help the learner to reflect on what has gone well and where there is room for further development. Feedback is invaluable and can be a powerful motivating factor. It should be honest but sensitive, critical but constructive, and it must always focus on improvements and point the way forward.

## **6. Plan interim developments**

Plan development activities for the learner to undertake between coaching sessions. Coaching should not be a spoon-feeding process; it is essential for the learner to be sufficiently motivated to develop the skills they have learned.

Encourage the learner to identify opportunities to practise skills. Improvement targets for practice sessions should be agreed before the close of the coaching session.

## **7. Close the session**

Discuss and review:

- the learner's success against the criteria and standards for acceptable performance agreed at the start
- how well the learner handles the learning process.

Plan the next steps. These may involve moving on to a further area for development or more coaching on the current task, if either the task or the learning objectives haven't been met in full.

## **Managers should avoid**

- making assumptions about the learner's prior level of knowledge and skill
- confusing coaching with assessment
- telling the learner what to do, or taking over if they experience difficulties
- forgetting about external criteria such as health and safety regulations or industry requirements.

## **Additional resources**

### **Books**

**Excellence in coaching: the industry guide**, Johnathan Passmore, ed  
London: Kogan Page, 2006

**The case for coaching: making evidence based decisions**,  
Jessica Jarvis, David A Lane and Annette Fillery-Travis  
London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2006

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

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

**Improving employee performance through workplace coaching: a practical guide to performance management,** Earl M A Carter and Frank 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

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

**Journal articles**

**Does coaching work,** Paul Kearns

Training Journal, Jun 2006, pp41-44

**The positive psychology of emotional intelligence and coaching,** Margaret Chapman and P Alex Linley

Competency and Emotional Intelligence, Winter vol 13 no 2, 2006, pp43-46

**The practices of effective managerial coaches,** Clinton O Longenecker and Mitchell J Neubert

Business Horizons, Nov/Dec vol 48 no 6 2005, pp493-500

This is a selection of journal articles available from the Management Information Centre. More information at: [www.managers.org.uk/mic](http://www.managers.org.uk/mic)

**Related checklists**

Giving feedback as a coach (222)

Giving criticism as a coach (223)

Devising a coaching programme (224)

**Internet resources**

**The Coaching and Mentoring Network** [www.coachingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk)

Resource centre offering coaching news and articles and a discussion forum for registered users.

**Mentoring for Change** [www.mentoringforchange.co.uk](http://www.mentoringforchange.co.uk)

Gives information on a range of coaching models and techniques.

**Organisations**

**Association for Coaching:** [www.associationforcoaching.com](http://www.associationforcoaching.com)

66 Church Road, London W7 1LB

**European Mentoring and Coaching Council:** [www.emccouncil.org](http://www.emccouncil.org)

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