

4

Job description, skills and qualities of a coach

You may be asking yourself how you fit into the model of coaching we have outlined. What will it involve? What is your role in the process?

Here is a generic job description for a coach:

Job description: Coach

Purpose: To work with individuals to improve their performance in a specific area or skill.

Key tasks and responsibilities

- Identifies development needs.
- Explains the coaching process to coachees, line managers and other stakeholders.
- Assists with the setting of learning goals and action planning.
- Uses a range of learning experiences to improve performance.
- Provides feedback for the coachee, based upon observed behaviour.
- Challenges the coachee's perception of his or her abilities.
- Helps the coachee to identify problems and possible routes to a solution.
- Supports the evaluation process by encouraging the coachee to assess progress against his or her learning goals.
- Helps the coachee to motivate self to achieve his or her learning goals.

Required skills/abilities

- planning and time management;
- analytical interpretation;
- negotiation;
- interpersonal skills;
 - building rapport
 - giving feedback
 - active listening
 - asking questions/gaining information
- observation;
- facilitation;
 - standard and goal setting
 - helping others learn
 - evaluation and review

Required qualities/attitudes

- supportive, empathetic;
- patient;
- positive attitude;
- respectful;
- trustworthy;
- honest;
- belief in people's potential;
- confident;
- objective and non-judgmental;
- sensitive;
- interested;
- perceptive;
- self-aware;
- attentive;
- retentive.

Required knowledge

Coaches require some knowledge of the subject that they will be coaching and specifically need to understand the expectations of performance; they do not need to be subject and/or technical experts. They also need knowledge of how adults learn and the theories of learning, along with the process of coaching.

5

Preparing to coach

Preparation for coaching will begin before you even have the initial conversation with your coachee to analyse the needs. In preparing to coach, we would suggest that you think about the following points.

Preparing yourself

- Consider who initiated the coaching process – do you need to consider how to work with third parties?
- Remind yourself of the role and responsibilities of a coach, perhaps by reviewing the coach job description and/or reviewing any documented corporate scheme.
- Get yourself into ‘coach mode’ – it is especially important to get yourself into the right frame of mind to coach if you are the coachee’s line manager or have responsibilities for training – it is about ‘putting on the right hat’.
- Put to one side any issues that might get in the way of you coaching someone else, eg your own work frustrations and ‘to do’ list – this is about clearing your mind so that you can focus all your attention on the coachee.
- Gather any equipment and/or information that you have or might need, eg brief from the coachee’s line manager, coachee job description, company standards and targets, pens and papers.
- Refresh yourself about the coaching process to make sure you are clear about the steps that you will be taking, eg think about some questions that you will ask your coachee, read through the coaching model.

Preparing the coaching environment

- Book a quiet, private and comfortable space for your meetings (think about what the coachee will feel comfortable with, as well as what you will).
- Allocate sufficient time for the meetings.
- Order refreshments etc.

Preparing the coachee

- Communicate with the coachee the purpose of your first meeting – this will be best done verbally rather than via e-mail or memo; it initiates the rapport-building and will allow the coachee to ask any questions that he or she may have as well as giving you the opportunity to allay any fears.
- Tell the coachee where the meeting will be in good time for him or her to get directions or raise concerns.
- If you feel it is appropriate, you may want the coachee to begin to think about what he or she wants from the coaching process by asking some questions or giving the coachee a questionnaire to complete.
- Remind the coachee to bring any documents that might be relevant.

6

Stage 1: Clarifying coaching needs and goals

By the end of this stage of the coaching process, you should have the following outcomes:

- Agreement that a development need exists and a broad idea of what that need is.
- An understanding, by the coachee and all stakeholders, of what coaching is and what the process will involve.
- Clearly stated goals for the coaching programme.

This is the first stage of the coaching process. During this stage the coach and the coachee will establish that there is a real need for coaching and will discuss the overall goals for the process. The specific objectives will come a little later – perhaps during the same meeting, or, more likely, during the next meeting.

What you do

The first thing you do is explore the reasons behind the request for coaching.

If **you** have initiated the coaching, ask yourself the following list of questions and be prepared to discuss your thoughts with the potential coachee.

- What makes you think that this person will benefit from coaching?
- What specific behaviours have you noticed that you would like to see changing?
- What do you want this person to be able to do better?

34 The coaching process

- What is the person not doing that you believe he or she is capable of?
- What achievements do you see this person being able to make as a result of coaching?
- What specific incidents can you describe that have led to you suggesting coaching?
- What have you told this person about why you think coaching would help him or her?
- Why have you chosen coaching, rather than other methods of development?
- What support will you be able to give this person during the coaching period and beyond?
- What do you think the impact of any changes in this person will be on the team and on others with whom the person comes into contact? What might the coachee need to do to deal with this impact?

If the *coachee* has initiated the coaching, it may be worth sending the person a revised version of this list of questions so that he or she can put some thought into his or her reasons for wanting coaching before your first meeting. This list of questions may then become the agenda for the first part of your initial meeting.

Is coaching the right approach?

In order to make sure that coaching is appropriate, very simply, go back to the definition of coaching:

*The process of helping people **enhance** or **improve** their performance through reflection on how they apply a specific skill and/or knowledge.*

Once a development need has been identified the main question is how will this need be fulfilled – is coaching the appropriate answer?

The key questions to ask yourself at this stage are:

- Does the person already have the skill or knowledge to perform this task?
- Will the person be performing the task in the near future?
- If you work with this person on a one-to-one basis, will you be able to help the person enhance or improve the relevant aspect of his or her performance?

If the answer to these questions is 'Yes', then coaching is probably the way forward. If the answer is 'No' then the following learning methods should be considered:

- classroom training;
- e-learning;
- on-the-job training;
- self-study material;
- action learning.

Other factors that need to be considered before starting the coaching process are:

- Does the potential coach have the skill or knowledge that this person is going to use?
- Do the potential coach and coachee have the time to participate in the coaching process? Have you considered the implications on productivity?
- Does the potential coach have well-developed coaching skills?
- Are there any known relationship issues between the potential coach and the coachee, eg previous conflicts?
- Does the coach have a clear understanding of what the development goal is and how to measure its achievement?
- Are there standards/competency statements laid down against which performance will be assessed?
- Is the coachee aware that he or she has the development need?
- Is the coachee willing to be coached?
- Is the chosen coach willing to coach this coachee?
- Has the coach considered the implications of coaching this person for the rest of his or her team members?

Initial conversations

Having explored the needs for coaching individually you now enter the most crucial part of this stage, which is discussing these with the coachee. While this could happen over the telephone, there is much to gain by having a face-to-face meeting. The aim is to have an honest and open conversation around the question 'Why are we here?'. This is also an opportunity to explore what you both understand about the purpose of coaching in general, ie that coaching is not necessarily remedial and is actually about moving performance forward from where it is today, whether this performance is good or poor.

Another point to make during this conversation is your motive as the coach. This is especially important if you have an existing relationship with the person as he or she may be wondering about this. If you are the person's line manager you may be viewed with extreme suspicion unless you explain exactly what

you are doing and why you are doing it. Equally, if you are not the coachee's line manager, he or she may wonder why you are doing this, what it really means, who else knows and what you will be getting out of it.

Part of this conversation will be about explaining the model of coaching so that the coachee understands the systematic approach that you are intending to follow. Go through the model and, if appropriate, give the coachee a copy of the process (shown in Chapter 3). As well as being open about the process, this allows the opportunity for you to tailor it to specific styles of working and opens the discussion about other requirements such as working hours and meeting places. This is also where you can talk about how you are going to work together, including any feedback that you will be giving to the coachees' managers, or others; requirements that you both should meet such as being on time for meetings or the coachee completing 'homework'. Explain to the coachee your ethics and stance on confidentiality, making mistakes and receiving feedback yourself. Ask the coachee if there are any ground rules that he or she would like you both to work with.

At the end of your meeting, ask the coachee if he or she feels that you will be able to work together. Chances are that the person will not say 'No', but the way in which 'Yes' is said will tell you a great deal. Observe body language, listen to the tone of voice used and decide whether you need to probe any further.

You may not wish to continue coaching this person if:

- You cannot get on. There is little rapport between you and you question whether you will be able to work together in this way. Rapport takes some time to build, but you will have an initial feel for how your relationship is likely to develop. Remember that you do not have to like each other, but you do need to have mutual respect and be able to establish a working relationship. If you feel that rapport can never be developed, now is the time to withdraw from the relationship.
- You don't feel that you are the right person to coach because you feel that you do not have enough knowledge of the subject matter. Depending on what you are coaching, it is not essential that you are able to perform at the level that the coachee is attempting to achieve. You need enough experience and knowledge of the subject matter to be able to help identify where the coachee could do better and help steer him or her towards the identified targets or standards.
- Having talked to the coachee you don't feel that coaching is the right development solution. It may become apparent that the coachee has training needs or even that his or her learning or communication style is such that the intense nature of the coaching relationship will not be right for this person.

Having established the overall development needs and decided that coaching is the right solution, you need to summarize the main points and create clear goals for the coaching that are agreed with your coachee. A development goal describes the overall purpose of what you will be doing. It describes what the coachee hopes to achieve from the process – the goal is about deciding where you are going, not how you will get there.

If practical, record this conversation in writing, and pass a copy of your notes to the coachee, so that you have the same understanding of what went on and an agreed way forward. Your notes here can then feed into Stage 2 of the process where you set the specific objectives for the coaching (see Chapter 7).

What could go wrong

The coachee didn't know that you had been asked to coach him or her and therefore wonders why you are arranging a meeting.

Discounting the option that the coachee is 'in denial', that is, he or she has been told, but tells you that this hasn't happened, the most usual situation is that he or she really has not been told. This might be for a variety of reasons:

- The person's manager has forgotten, being very busy with other things.
- Poor communication and the general personal relationship between the manager and member of staff means that the manager has not initiated the conversation, because he or she is unsure how to, or prefers not to.
- The manager wants to abdicate all responsibility to you, usually because he or she fears the reaction of the staff member and/or this is the easy option.

The solution is the same for any of the reasons listed and is formed from the desire to maintain the relationship with the coachee. Talk about what coaching is, how you got involved, the potential benefits for the coachee and what the process will involve – then ask the coachee if he or she is happy to proceed. If the coachee is happy to go on, then you can continue with the meeting.

If the coachee is not happy, it is not possible to proceed. You can ask some questions such as, 'What could we do to make you more comfortable with this?' or 'Why do you think your manager suggested this?' Fundamentally, however, coaching is a two-way relationship and if one party does not wish to participate you cannot be successful. Together you will need to agree how this decision is communicated to the line manager; either the coachee talks to the manager, you talk to the manager or you talk to him or her together. Wherever possible it is good to encourage the coachee to take responsibility and own his or her

own decisions; therefore the ideal is to get the coachee to talk to his or her line manager. Follow up with both parties afterwards to review the situation and check that both parties are still happy.

The coachee doesn't agree to your ground rules.

The whole point of ground rules is to get agreement about how you will work together. You need to use your negotiation and influencing skills to arrive at an agreed position. Probe to establish the underlying reasons why some ground rules are acceptable and others are not – often this is about perception and understanding of the language that is being used. Remember that your disagreement may arise from some of your own personal beliefs, so ask yourself 'Is it really that important on this occasion and, if so, why?'

Your existing relationship may get in the way.

Given that you may be the coachee's line manager, are you the right person for the coachee to share his or her fears and doubts with? Can you maintain the role of coach no matter what the coachee tells you? Line managers can be very effective coaches by being clear about the purpose of their actions and explaining this to the member of staff. What gets in the way, if you are the person's line manager as well as the coach, is the coachee's concern that you are criticizing or telling him or her off. As coach, you need to be very honest at the start of each meeting about what the purpose of the discussion is and what role you are taking. Therefore, we recommend that if you are offering coaching to overcome a poor performance situation, you separate the giving of feedback from the start of the coaching process. Another solution here may be to find another coach from within or outside the organization.

The coachee doesn't want to be coached or sees it as a bad reflection on his or her abilities.

Your role here is to 'sell' the concept of coaching and to explain the developmental nature of the process. It is useful here to be able to explain the concept of continuous development – that however good we are already, we should always strive for future development. Perhaps give examples of when you have coached or been coached in the past and how it has helped.

Skills required

- communication;
 - questioning

- listening
- interpreting non-verbal communication
- summarizing
- assertiveness
- interpreting and analysing information.

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