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Leadership Essentials

Coaching

Achieving leaders have coaching conversations



'Coaching focuses on helping another person learn in ways that let him or her keep growing afterward. It is based on asking rather than telling, on provoking thought rather than giving directions and on holding a person accountable for his or her goals' (Frankovelgia, 2010)

What is Coaching?

Coaching is a relational activity to help and support individuals to learn and develop, leading to enhanced performance and desirable results aligned to specified objectives and goals.

Coaching is different to mentoring or counselling, though it does share some techniques with both, and is solutions-focused and results-orientated.

Leaders who coach their staff appropriately, individually or in teams, report effective results. It can be more time consuming in the short term than other methods of training, improving or developing your team members, but coaching pays dividends overall. It is acknowledged as one of the best ways to get improved performance from your team.

When you as a coaching manager act as a coach to your team members, you are essentially having one or a series of conversations with them in which you encourage and help them to reflect on their performance and potential. The purpose of this is to maximise their productivity by increasing their general awareness, including about the range of choices (in thinking, attitude and actions) available to them in any situation, and expanding their sense of responsibility.

As a coaching manager, you are therefore responsible for keeping your team member focused on clearly-defined goals, facilitating their thinking, and delivering constructive feedback to build upon their strengths and skills and improve their performance.

You are also responsible for behaving ethically in the way you relate to your team member:

'The effective coach or mentor is responsible for considering their ethical perspective, and agreeing with the client how they will work together. It is the responsibility of the coach or mentor to create a climate where ways of working can be discussed. It is their responsibility to monitor their standards of practice and reflect on how they are working with clients. It is also their responsibility to be aware of other sources of help that they or their client might call upon if needed.'

Connor, M. and Pokora, J. (2012)

The Coaching Contract

It is important to establish ground rules and mutual expectations right at the start of the coaching relationship, and this Coaching Contract should be discussed and agreed and recorded in writing, with copies for the coaching manager and the team member.

It is a 'living' document that can be reviewed and amended at any time, and is likely to include the following:

- Expectations of each other and of the relationship
- Coaching aims and objectives
- Any confidentiality issues that may arise
- Duration of the coaching relationship
- Location
- Roles and responsibilities of both parties
- Responsibilities either party may have outside the coaching relationship, e.g. to other managers
- How the coaching relationship will end
- The notice acceptable to both parties should the relationship be cancelled

The Coaching Context

The coaching relationship is fundamental to the success, or otherwise, of coaching. It is essential that a trusting relationship is established, and that expectations of, and parameters to, the coaching process are established from the beginning.

You should also take time to research your team member as a background knowledge of your team member gives them confidence and builds trust and enables coaching to be better focused.

An initial meeting is important to establish ground rules and an understanding of how you will work together.

You should also make yourself aware of any issues in the wider team member context that may impact on your coaching relationship, such as:

- The level of support from line managers or other stakeholders
- The organisational culture
- Who you must contract with
- The systems, structures and processes in place to support the coaching relationship

A Learning Plan then needs to be co-created for planning and managing the coaching process that identifies:

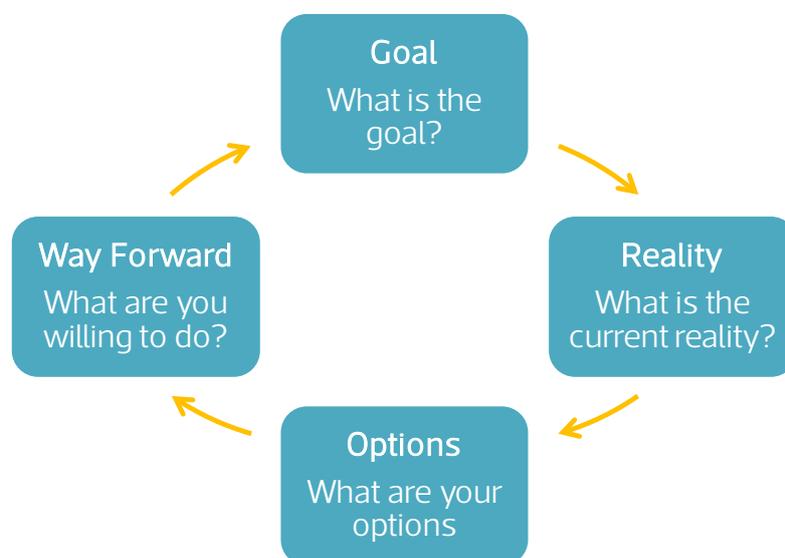
- What your team member wants, or needs, to learn (Learning Goal)
- The knowledge, skill or attitude to be developed to attain the Learning Goal
- Resources or support required
- Success criteria
- Target dates for review and completion

You should also set time aside to provide ongoing feedback and recognition to help guide and reinforce progress.

Coaching Skills and Techniques

Start the coaching session by asking the team member for their own view of the present situation, using active listening and asking open questions to encourage them to talk openly and to raise their awareness and therefore insight into the issue.

A well-established sequence of questions is offered by the GROW model:



Ensure that you give your team member positive feedback yet challenge them on any apparent contradictions. This should then lead to further discussion and a course of action based on agreed goals and milestones. Finally, arrange the next meeting to report on progress.

Potential Barriers to Coaching in the Workplace

Whilst coaching can play a valuable role in people and organisational development, it is important to be aware of any perceived or actual barriers to coaching, the most common of which are outlined below:

Potential Barrier	Suitable Strategies to Overcome the Barrier
Lack of leadership from the top	The CEO and other management team members tell their coaching stories and lead by example by practising good coaching techniques with their teams
Lack of understanding of the value of coaching in the workplace	Position coaching as part of a wider culture change process to ensure top talent is attracted, developed and retained by the company
Time to learn and practice	Allocate managers into peer coaching groups to meet up at least once a month to discuss coaching challenges, successes and learning
Over-complicated techniques	Train managers to be skilled to apply one pragmatic and proven coaching process and equip them with core coaching skills
Insufficient reward and recognition	Coaching behaviours and outcomes need to be part of the performance management system

Adapted from Brook, J. (2015)

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Dimensions of Leadership

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