

THE
MCGRAW-HILL
ONE-DAY WORKSHOP

COACHING AND COUNSELLING SKILLS

PHIL LOWE

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COACHING AND COUNSELLING SKILLS

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Participant's Guide

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1. Introduction

Objectives

The purpose of this workshop is to give you the opportunity to learn, practice, and apply the skills required for effective on-the-job coaching and workplace counselling.

By the end of the day, you should:

- Understand the difference between coaching and other forms of workplace learning
- Be aware of the range of skills and applications related to coaching and counselling
- Have identified opportunities to increase your own use of the relevant skills

2. What is coaching?

Exercise: What is coaching?

In your pairs, share any experiences you have—or think you have—of coaching or being coached. Consider specifically:

1. What techniques have you found particularly effective?
2. What would you consider to be the main barriers to effective coaching?
3. How would you define 'coaching'?

What is coaching?

In the 1990s, coaching has become increasingly important as a way of developing the skills of employees. It is a two way process in which a manager, through direct discussion and guided activity, builds skills and relationships in order to maintain or improve performance.

Because the most effective learning is informal and incidental, coaching provides an ideal opportunity to learn on the job, at the very point at which the need for a new skill or piece of knowledge becomes apparent. In its ideal form coaching is non-threatening, because it focuses on behavior rather than results, and because the coach manages the process in such a way that the employee has the experience of developing skills for him- or herself, rather than simply 'being told what to do'.

Coaching occurs whenever the manager:

- Provides positive feedback reinforcing effective behavior, and thus helps to cement in the employee's mind the behavior which needs to be used in the future.
- Listens to others' concerns, and thus promotes a sense of trust and accessibility within the manager/employee relationship.
- Provides corrective feedback indicating concerns about ineffective behavior and thus reduces the likelihood of inefficiency or counterproductive working.

- Clears the air by tackling issues of concern before they become serious—and by confirming whether or not there really is an issue for concern. A lack of communication increases the likelihood that unfounded concerns are not dealt with and hamper a productive manager-employee relationship.
- Helps a colleague to perform a new task, develop a skill, solve a problem, or build confidence. The word 'colleague' here is deliberately chosen: Whether the coaching relationship is between peers or manager and subordinate, the concept of mutual respect and teamworking is fundamental. The person in a coaching role is always 'helping', never 'telling'.

Coaching ground rules

- Focus on behavior, not the person—there is a big difference between telling someone “There were a few problems with that job” and “You caused a few problems on that job”. Focusing on the task or the behavior in question keeps the discussion objective, and makes the person on the receiving end less likely to become defensive or to feel personally attacked.
- Be descriptive, not evaluative. Tell the person what the bad thing they did was—not how bad it was.
- Listen. Keep the focus on the other person. Ask him or her for an opinion. It is far better that you help them get the answer for themselves than to tell them the answer.
- Be concrete. As far as possible, come up with specific, identifiable points to correct or to build on. However, if you have to rely on a general impression rather than specific evidence, use this as a basis for discussion—it’s better than ignoring the issue altogether.
- Be clear and direct—don’t beat around the bush. Use ‘I’ statements as far as possible (“I want us to look at how you handled that job”; “I have some comments I’d like to discuss with you”—not “Some people possibly think that perhaps there were a few problems with some of the work”.)

- Be timely. Give feedback—whether positive or negative—as close to the event as possible. If you hang around, the opportunity for learning may be lost (and you may justifiably be asked “Why didn’t you tell me about this before? I could have done something about it”.)
- Deal with one issue at a time. Don’t overload the person with examples, comments, and impressions. Focus on each specific point, come to some agreement about action, and move on.
- Emphasize mutual responsibility. A performance problem may not be your employee’s fault—you as manager may be contributing to it—or may be able to help in correcting it. Coaching is a joint process, and you both have to contribute to making it work.
- Emphasize building strengths rather than improving weaknesses. The easiest way for anyone to improve is to utilize the strengths they already have. Help the other person to see how he or she can use personal strengths to perform better in the future.
- Solicit the individual’s self-evaluation of strengths and needed improvements. Any evaluation of a person’s behavior or qualities is subjective, so it is better to use the other person’s own self-evaluation as a starting point for discussion. By finding out what he or she thinks of himself or herself, you are in a better position to identify the right development opportunities for that particular individual.

Benefits of coaching

- Coaching helps to achieve both performance improvement and employee development. The organization is getting a better standard of performance from its employees, while maintaining a level of investment in their future potential.
- That investment is short term—because it is specific and episodic, relying on manager-employee contact—but the gains to the organization are long term with regard to performance standards and quality of staff.
- Delegation becomes more effective because:
 - Those to whom the work is delegated have the competence necessary to carry out that work.
 - They also have confidence in their ability to perform the work, and that they will be supported by their manager.
 - Trust between manager and employee is increased: The manager trusts the employee's capabilities; the employee trusts the manager's intentions and support.
- By increasing the competence of those within his or her team, the manager frees up time to concentrate on his or her managerial role.
- Decision making and responsiveness are speeded up as employees at lower levels have the competence to take on more responsibility and accountability.
- Work becomes more challenging and meaningful for both the coach and the employee. Retention is improved, and better quality staff can be recruited.

Barriers to coaching

- If either manager or employee are short of time, or under short-term pressure, it can be difficult to justify giving up time for coaching activities which have no immediate tangible outcomes.
- A lack of resources or capabilities on the part of the organization, so that coaching never becomes part of the everyday activity.
- Fear—on the part of the manager, who may worry about losing control over his or her work and responsibilities.
- A reluctance on the part of manager or employee to confront issues which need to be addressed, and therefore missing opportunities for coaching.
- A lack of skills on the part of the manager, who may not know the best way to handle particular situations or coaching opportunities.

Helping style questionnaire

Please complete the questionnaire by circling one of the numbers (1–6) for each question. You may find it helpful to focus on how you are helping particular individuals, or you may want to consider more generally your overall approach.

1. Before telling people about a job I want them to do, I work out stage by stage what is involved in it:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

2. I actively seek out opportunities for them to develop themselves through doing new things at work:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

3. I listen to their ideas, and help them fit these into their broad plans for work and life:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

4. When I have something I want them to do, I give people very clear instructions:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

5. I help them to plan how they can meet challenges at work:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

6. I ask them questions that help them to think through why they want to do things:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

7. I check that they have got their instructions accurately:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

8. I am prepared to let people try out new skills even if there is a risk they may not do the job well:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

9. I am interested in what they do outside work, and how this fits or conflicts with work activities:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

10. I check up on things I've asked them to do, and let them know how they did:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

11. I encourage learners to review how they perform, and to plan how to improve:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

12. I sit down with them and help them to think about where they are going in their career:

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 Often

Team exercise: Spot the coach

In your teams, review briefly each of the five simple vignettes. Which individuals, if any, do you think are playing the role of coach?

What roles are the other individuals playing? Why?

Vignette 1:

Susanne

Susanne is a manager of a unit of a contract catering company that serves the staff of a medium-sized factory and office block. Her staff are taught the details of their jobs, and are given refresher training on health, safety, hygiene, and quality at regular intervals. She keeps a watchful eye on how jobs are being done and points out deviation from performance in a friendly manner. She checks how customers of her canteen find the service, and feeds back praise to her staff while taking action to remedy complaints.

Most of her staff like her, enjoy the work and the company, and have been with her for a long time. One or two younger staff resent 'her interfering ways', and find they have 'little opportunity for advancement'.

Vignette 2:

Gerald

Gerald is staff trainer at the country-house style training center of a major bank. He teaches international procedures, international service appreciation and international trade finance. He prepares lesson plans very carefully, and when the trainees are carrying out exercises, he patrols the classroom constantly, looking out for errors and difficulties and correcting them when they arise. He spends a lot of time visiting branches, developing trainees who have attended his courses. He likes to find out how they have been performing back at work, and explains the application of procedures that are still causing difficulty.

Some of his trainees respect him, and most accept that he 'knows his stuff', and is 'very conscientious'. However, others find that he is a bit oppressive in his attention, and gets fussy about tiny and, to them, irrelevant points, which they would be able to work out for themselves in time. Others find his approach cold and impersonal. The fact that he spends so much time with each individual can mean that other trainees have to wait, often for quite long periods, before he gets round to visiting them.