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*Manager's Quick Guide: Leading People*  
**COACHING FOR IMPROVED PERFORMANCE**



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# Introduction

Coaching has attracted much attention in recent years as a method of developing senior leaders and executives. Coaching is also a popular tool for developing employee potential and work performance. Coaching is now seen as a key ingredient in improving employee engagement in organisations.

When used appropriately, coaching can be a cost-effective approach to development, focusing on specific individuals and their identified development needs. The need to recruit new employees can be reduced by developing the skills of existing employees. Coaching can also improve motivation, leading to a reduction in staff turnover. It sends a positive message to employees that 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 conducted in an atmosphere of trust and respect.

Coaching is best used as one of a range of learning and training activities. It can be a good way to reinforce learning and help employees to apply theoretical knowledge-based learning acquired from formal training. It may be carried out by external, professional coaches but increasingly internal coaches, normally line managers, are undertaking coaching within organisations.

Those providing coaching will themselves need training, supervision and support. This checklist is designed for internal coaches, and provides guidance on conducting a coaching session

## Definition

Coaching is a method of helping people to develop their self-awareness and their skills and knowledge to improve their job performance or personal growth. Coaching may be undertaken informally by managers as part of their day-to-day responsibility to develop their team, or under the guidance of a professional coach.

Coaching is about questioning and enabling the individual to identify gaps in their skills or knowledge and to plan and support them in addressing these through a range of work-based activities. It is essentially non-directive, with the emphasis on helping the individual being coached to learn, rather than teaching or training them, and on encouraging 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 focuses on longer-term development or progress within an organisation. A further distinction between coaching and mentoring is that coaching is usually a line management function, whereas mentoring is almost always out of the line. (see Related checklists on page 6).

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.

# Action checklist

## 1. Gain support and recognition from the organisation and recognise barriers to coaching

Firstly, gain the support from senior management to ensure that all coaching activity is recognised as being an important part of the working day. Acknowledgment of additional time and resources is essential if the coaching activity is to be a success. If the coach feels that the organisation does not give priority to coaching activities when compared to other tasks, they may postpone, cut short or fail to put their best efforts and concentration into the coaching sessions. Coaching stands a far better chance of success if the coach is motivated and focused on the task at hand, and feels that their performance is being monitored, and supported, by senior managers.

Be aware of barriers to effective coaching: the most common is a lack of acceptance of the role of coach both by the person undertaking the coaching and by the person being coached. Consider also any relevant gender or cultural factors and take these into account when deciding where and when the sessions should take place and how they should be managed.

## 2. 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 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 Y and Z')
- agree and define success criteria, or task objectives, between the coach and the learner, specifying the standard against which success will be judged
- 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
- ensure the person wants, or at least understands the need, to be coached, e.g. for performance reasons.

It is important to make coaching specific in terms of skills or aspects of work. Open-ended and non-specific coaching can result in the sessions veering off course and limiting the creativity and potential of the learner.

## 3. 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 blend of approaches which seems most suitable. To help to identify an individual's learning style, the model Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles could be a useful aid here. In addition, Kolb's Learning Cycle can provide insights into how to learn more effectively. (See Related models on page 6)

## 4. Identify potential opportunities for coaching

In coaching it can be useful for the learner to try out practical skills in an actual work setting and reflect on how successful they have been. Consider whether a suitable opportunity for coaching can be identified, and, taking into consideration the priorities that have been set, arrange a suitable time for the first session.

## 5. Carry out the coaching session using your chosen coaching model

The most appropriate method of coaching is to invite learners to explain or demonstrate what they actually do. In the case of a practical task, ask them what happened and why and get them to consider whether there was an alternative approach they might have tried and whether this might have been more successful.

It is helpful to provide a clear structure for coaching sessions. There are a number of coaching models which can be used. The OSCAR Model, for example, is an enhancement of the widely used GROW model:

**Outcome** - help the team member to clarify their outcomes

**Situation** - gain clarity around where the team member is right now

**Choices and consequences** - generating alternative choices and raising awareness of the consequences

**Actions** - clarify the next steps and taking responsibility

**Review** - ongoing process of review and evaluation

This introduces a 'choices and consequences' component and a review section which is particularly relevant to managers. The structure includes relevant questions, explores risk and encourages ownership and responsibility.

### **6. Review progress**

Help the learner to reflect on what has gone well and where there is room for further development. Any feedback given by the coach should be honest but sensitive, critical but constructive, and must always focus on improvements for the future.

### **7. 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 new skills. Improvement targets for practice sessions should be agreed before the close of the coaching session.

### **8. Monitor performance and progress**

At the close of each session, discuss and review:

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

Plan the next steps. This may involve more coaching on the current task, if either the task or the learning objectives have not been met in full or moving on to a further area for development. Devise a checklist as a means of objectively assessing long-term performance and improvement. Consider:

- including key milestones/dates to be achieved
- recording each coaching session and monthly/quarterly review dates
- gaining feedback from both the learner and their line manager making recommendations for next steps in the development cycle.

This provides a means of tracking performance for future reference, and helps to ensure the clarity and transparency of the whole process.

# Potential pitfalls

Managers should avoid:

- trying to implement change without top management sponsorship and commitment
- going ahead without involving employees at every stage of design and implementation
- failing to anticipate resistance or prepare for it
- forgetting to take into account implementation costs
- getting lost in the detail and losing sight of the vision
- failing to publicise successes to build up momentum and support.

## Additional resources

### Books

Internal coaching: the inside story, Katharine St John-Brooks, London: Karmac Books, 2014

How to coach: Coaching yourself and your team to success, Jo Owen, Harlow: Pearson Education, 2013

Challenging coaching: going beyond traditional coaching to face the facts, John Blakey and Ian Day, London: Nicholas Brealey, 2012

Coaching and mentoring: a critical text, Simon Western, London: Sage, 2012

Manager as coach: the new way to get results, Jenny Rogers, Andrew Gilbert and Karen Whittleworth, Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 2012

This book is available as an ebook. The five-minute coach: improve performance rapidly, Lynne Cooper and Melina Castellino, Bancyfelin: Crown House, 2012

Leading and coaching teams to success: the secret life of teams, Philip Hayes, Open University Press, 2011 This book is available as an ebook

Managing coaching at work: developing, managing and sustaining coaching in organizations, Jackie Keddy and Clive Johnson, London: Kogan Page, 2011 This book is available as an ebook

Excellence in coaching: the industry guide, 2nd ed, Jonathan Passmore, ed, London: Kogan Page, 2010 This book is available as an ebook

The coaching kaleidoscope: insights from the inside, Manfred Kets de Vries, and others Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

### Journal articles

Making it count, Erik De Haan and Nadine Page Training Journal, August 2013, pp 66-69

Questions not advice, Alison Hartley Training Journal, August 2010, pp 68-70

### Related checklists

Giving feedback as a coach (222)

Giving criticism as a coach (223)

Devising a coaching programme (224)

Mentoring in practice (083)

### Related models

ACHIEVE Coaching Model

CLEAR Model for Coaching

The GROW Model

Heron's Six Categories of Intervention

Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles

Kolb's Learning Cycle

OSCAR Model of Coaching

STEPPPA Model for Coaching

### Organisations

Association for Coaching  
Golden Cross House, 8 Duncannon Street, London WC2N 4JF  
Tel: 0845 653 1050 Web: [www.associationforcoaching.com](http://www.associationforcoaching.com)

The International Coach Federation (ICF)  
59 Birmingham Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 6PG  
Tel: 01922 660 088  
Web: [www.coachfederation.org.uk](http://www.coachfederation.org.uk)

European Mentoring and Coaching Council: PO Box 3154, Marlborough, Wiltshire, SN8 3WD  
Tel: 0121 222 8808  
Web: [www.emccouncil.org](http://www.emccouncil.org)





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