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Coaching for Performance: The Principles and Practice of Coaching and Leadership



Authored by: (Whitmore & Brealey, 2017)

Coaching for Performance: The Principles and Practice of Coaching and Leadership – Adapted for learning purposes

What is Coaching?

Coaching focuses on future possibilities, not past mistakes

Overview

Despite the existence of the International Coach Federation (ICF) with members in 138 countries, if you look up "coach" or "coaching" on the Oxford Dictionaries website, you'll be none the wiser as to what all these people are up to. It offers two definitions. The first mentions a bus used for longer journeys, a railway carriage, and traveling. The second includes sports instruction or training, private tuition, and extra teaching. It might surprise you to learn that the first is more relevant. Coaching is all about a journey and nothing about instruction or teaching. It is as much if not more about the way things are done as about what is done. Coaching delivers results in large measure because of the powerful working relationship created, and the means and style of communication used. The coachee does acquire facts and develops new skills and behaviors, not by being told or taught but by discovering from within, stimulated by coaching. Of course, the objective of improving performance is paramount, and how that is best achieved and sustained is what this book reveals.

The Inner Game

Let us take a look at the birth of modern-day coaching. Timothy Gallwey was perhaps the first to demonstrate a simple but comprehensive method of coaching over four decades ago. A Harvard educationalist and tennis expert, he threw down the gauntlet in 1974 with a book entitled *The Inner Game of Tennis*, which was quickly followed by *Inner Skiing* and *The Inner Game of Golf*.

The word "inner" was used to indicate the player's internal state or, to use Gallwey's words, that "the opponent within one's own head is more formidable than the one the other side of the net." Anyone who has had one of those days on the court when you can't do anything right will recognize what he is referring to. Gallwey went on to claim that if a coach can help a player to remove or reduce the internal obstacles to performance, an unexpected natural ability to learn and to perform will occur without the need for much technical input from the coach.

The Inner Game Equation

To illustrate this, Gallwey created a simple Inner Game Equation which, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see very effectively summarizes the objective of modern coaching:

$$\text{Performance} = \text{potential} - \text{interference}$$
$$P = p - i$$

Both the Inner Game and coaching focus on improving performance (P) by growing potential (p) and by decreasing interference (i).

Internal obstacles are often more daunting than external ones.

At the time Gallwey's books first appeared, few coaches, instructors, or professional sportspeople could believe his ideas, let alone embrace them, although players devoured them eagerly in bestseller-list quantities. The professionals' ground of being was under threat. They thought that Gallwey was trying to turn the teaching of sport on its head and that he was undermining their egos, their authority, and the principles

in which they had invested so much. In a way he was, but their fear exaggerated their fantasies about his intentions. He was not threatening them with redundancy, merely proposing that they would be more effective if they changed their approach.

Mentoring

Since I am defining coaching, I should perhaps mention mentoring, another word that is now common in business parlance. The word originates from Greek mythology, in which it is reported that Odysseus, when setting out for Troy, entrusted his house and the education of his son Telemachus to his friend, Mentor. "Tell him all you know," Odysseus said, and thus unwittingly set some limits to mentoring.

Some people use the term mentoring interchangeably with coaching. However, mentoring is very different to coaching, because coaching is not dependent on a more experienced person passing down their knowledge – in fact, this undermines the building of self-belief which creates sustained performance, as we shall discover. Instead, coaching requires expertise in coaching, not in the subject at hand. That is one of its great strengths. And something that coaching leaders grapple with most – but is key – is to learn when to share their knowledge and experience and when not to.

Mike Sprecklen was the coach and mentor to the famous all-conquering British rowing pair Andy Holmes and Steve Redgrave. "I was stuck, I had taught them all I knew technically," Sprecklen said on completion of a Coaching for Performance workshop many years ago, "but this opens up the possibility of going further, for they can feel things that I can't even see." He had discovered a new way forward with them, working from their experience and perceptions rather than from his own. Good coaching and leading, and good mentoring for that matter, can and should take a coachee beyond the limitations of the coach, leader, or mentor's own knowledge

MILLENNIALS SEEK MEANING AND PURPOSE

Some employees, especially younger ones, are showing signs of seeking self-actualizing needs. They want their work to be of value and to have meaning and purpose, and traditional organizations are losing out as a result. These organizations must understand that lining the pockets of shareholders is no longer seen as meaningful. Companies are obliged to consider more carefully their ethics and values and the needs of all their stakeholders, including employees first and foremost, but also customers, the community, and the environment.

These are the issues that leaders and employees on the workshops we run are raising more and more frequently. Companies are seeking a change of leadership style, and employees are demanding it. If these young and, in Maslow's terms, more mature employees are not to become disaffected, the changes need to get underway immediately. So important is this issue, and so enormous will be the benefits to performance and ultimately to the triple bottom line of people, profit, and planet, that in this edition I have reorganized the book to address it more fully.

THE CHOICE OF LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR

While millennials are demanding this change in leadership style, leaders do not know how to provide it. Our experience shows that the development of employees is the lowest priority of four criteria that cause us to adapt our leadership behavior in the moment. At the head of the list comes time pressure, then fear, and next comes the quality of the job or the product, leaving employee development a poor fourth. Shortage of time and excess fear drive us into command and control, while the quality of work and the need for development demand coaching.

It comes as little surprise that coaching is sometimes sidelined by short-termism and the urgency of the need to provide shareholder returns. However, the wake-up call has been sounded in the changing expectations of younger employees. At job interviews they want to know what training and development opportunities and what style of leadership they can expect. They do not seek – and nor do they want – a job for life, and they will leave a job if their needs are not met. And those needs are for things that will help their self-belief, such as a coaching leadership style.

Leadership style needs to evolve

Most business leaders today have reached Maslow's status and recognition level – and this is where they can do the most harm. They are often arrogant, assertive, domineering, and self-important. They will do anything to get more pay; they don't need or deserve it, but it is a way of measuring and asserting their status.

However, if a business leader does escape the trap and progress to the next level, the need for self-belief, the leadership news gets better. Leaders who aspire to be there, or are there, will really try to do the right thing, rather than trying to *appear* to do the right thing or to do things right. Only being authentic gives the feel-good factor that accompanies self-belief. What this is all about, of course, is the emergence of broader altruistic values – leading for others rather than for oneself.

Leadership by people any lower than this on the scale has a selfish element regardless of the other skills they might possess. Such leadership is only useful to those they lead if those employees happen to have the same aspirations. And while leaders at the level of self-belief are well motivated, they might seek to be a little more high profile than a leader who has reached the next level – self-actualizing. This is sometimes called the level of service. Service is often seen as the answer to the search for meaning and purpose, something that people used to gain from their religion but now look for elsewhere, including while at work. Service to others manifests in a wide spectrum of forms, is very fulfilling, and is the universal way to meeting this need. One of the leaders of a multinational manufacturing company who attended an in-house program we ran for global leaders said: "I have realized that my job is to develop people every day, and I love it!" Learning a coaching style enabled him to tap into the potential of his people.

Toward the end of his life, Maslow added the level of self-realization. However, as I have said, development is a journey, not a destination. Some recent commentators also define self-actualizing more modestly and flatter business leaders by suggesting that they, and indeed many others, are at this level. I do not share that view. As far as I am concerned, in order to earn the title of leader a person must have evolved beyond the status and recognition level and beyond self-interest. Aspiring leaders will hone their leadership skills at lower levels while they are growing into the job, but their power to exercise control over others should be constrained until they have grown up.

The good news is that change is in the air, evolution marches on despite expected resistance, environmental concerns are becoming integrated into business strategy as opposed to being a tick-box exercise for appearances, and this is further driven by consumer and public demand for transparency, which is becoming more effective at policing business excesses, often via the internet. Evolution is key if we are to rise to the challenges of the twenty-first century. Coaching is the mechanism of transformation.

The need toward which a large segment of modern society is beginning to move is that of self-belief and independence, with a few people yearning for self-actualization and interdependence. Traditional businesses and management methods of command and control which create dependence are very poor at meeting this need, and that is what has to change. In fact, I believe that leaders fail to do so principally because they have simply never been taught how. The only way they learned was by being told. Adult learning theory tells us that adults learn in a completely different way to children. Self-belief is central to this. Coaching is adult learning in practice and is both what leaders need and the direction in which leadership style needs to travel.

In essence coaching is about partnership, collaboration, and believing in potential. I will take a close look at the principles of coaching in Part II, and explain my central premise that coaching and high performance

come out of **awareness** and **responsibility**. To achieve this requires the foundation coaching skills of **powerful questioning** and **active listening** and a framework of compass for our coaching

Creating High-Performance Cultures

Enabling a coaching culture generates high performance

Overview

What are the implications for organizations whose leaders adopt a coaching leadership style or who work with a coach on a 1:1 basis? Those leaders will, indisputably, create the conditions for a high-performance culture. The evolutionary journey of our species has reached the stage at which the hierarchies of the past are being replaced by a new form of devolved leadership and collective responsibility. Could it be that the coaching profession has grown so fast because it meets this broader need for self-responsibility, which, after all, is its principal product? Could the coaching profession have emerged to be a midwife for a new era, or is that too grand a notion? Could the only thing limiting us be the size of our vision and our own self-limiting beliefs?

A NEW STYLE

Most of the organizations we work with approach us because they are seeking to improve performance and have embarked on a process of fundamental change – or at least they would like to. They have recognized that, if they are to achieve real performance improvement, their leaders must adopt a coaching style. These companies have already identified that coaching is the leadership style of a transformed culture, and that as the style changes from directing to coaching, the culture of the organization will begin to change. Hierarchy gives way to partnership and collaboration, blame gives way to honest evaluation and learning, external motivators are replaced by self-motivation, protective barriers fall as teams build, change is no longer feared but welcomed, satisfying the boss becomes pleasing the customer. Secrecy and censorship are replaced by openness and honesty, pressure of work becomes challenging work, and short-term fire-fighting reactions give way to longer-term strategic thinking. Table 1 lists some of the characteristics of the emerging high-performance culture, but each business will have its own unique mix and priorities.

Table 1: Attributes of a high-performance culture

Old culture	New culture
Growth	Sustainability
Imposed rules	Inner values
Fear	Trust
Quantity	Quality
Excess	Sufficiency
Teaching	Learning
In/dependence	Interdependence
Success	Service
Control of nature	Natural systems
Degradation	Re-creation

A COACHING MINDSET CREATES HIGH PERFORMANCE

So how is it that coaching creates high performance? How do we know that high performance is correlated with an **interdependent**, integrated culture? How is all this proven?

Answers to these questions come from our work with multinational clients, the most recent example of which I'd like to share with you here. Linde AG, one of the leading gas and engineering companies in the world, approached us to bring in a safety performance culture across its plants. As the team looked into the work Linde was already doing, they were enormously impressed by the extent to which it was measuring its culture. This is something that we at Performance Consultants have long believed needs to be done universally but, as I've already said, few companies do it. When the team examined why Linde was so sophisticated in measuring its culture, they found the answer: people's lives were at stake.

Companies like Linde are what are termed "high reliability organizations" (HROs), organizations that seek to sustain error-free performance despite operating in complex and hazardous conditions where the consequences of a mistake could be catastrophic; a life-and-death situation. Other types of organizations that would be regarded as HROs include oil companies, airline carriers, air control authorities, nuclear power generators, and petrochemical plants.

Our team investigated the work done by HROs and others in the area of "safety maturity" and found that extensive work had indeed been conducted. Safety maturity models look at the maturity of an organization's safety behavior by assessing its safety culture. There are many models, variously mapping safety results across anything from three to eight stages of behavior maturity, as Foster and Hoult report. Looking through the lens of coaching, each of those stages relates to human development and the levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see Chapter 1) and William Schutz's theory of interpersonal behavior in teams (see Chapter 17). They also correlate with the leader's level of emotional intelligence. As with individuals, cultures are seen to develop in stages.

The Leader as Coach

Leaders must be experienced as a support by their team, not as a threat

Overview

There is a paradox in coaching leadership, because the leader traditionally holds the pay check, the key to promotion, and also the axe. This is fine so long as you believe that the only way to motivate is through the judicious application of the carrot and the stick. However, for coaching to work at its best, the relationship between the coach and the coachee must be one of partnership in the endeavor, of trust, of safety, and of minimal pressure. The check, the key, and the axe have no place here, as they can serve only to inhibit such a relationship.

Can a leader be a coach?

Can a leader, therefore, be a coach at all? Yes, but as discussed in the previous chapter, coaching is emotional intelligence in practice and demands the highest qualities of that leader: empathy, integrity, and balance, as well as a willingness, in most cases, to adopt a fundamentally different approach to employees. Coaching leaders will also have to find their own way, for there are few role models for them to follow, and they may experience initial resistance from some of their employees, who might be suspicious of any departure from traditional management. They may fear the additional personal responsibility implicit in a coaching style of leadership. These problems can be anticipated and generally are easily coached away, but a different set of behaviors is required

The application of coaching

When and where do we use coaching and what for? As we have discussed, coaching is on-the-job development; a coaching mindset is a way of being and so is relevant whatever you are doing. As we shall explore in the next chapter, a coaching mindset is one where you see the coachee as equal to you and as having the capability of overcoming barriers and obstacles and fulfilling their potential. From that mindset, you are able to communicate honestly with that person, no matter what the subject is.

There are some obvious situations in the workplace where a coaching approach will enhance your conversation:

- Goal setting
- Strategic planning
- Creating engagement
- Motivating and inspiring
- Delegating
- Teamworking
- Problem solving
- Planning and reviewing
- Team and people development
- Career development
- Performance management
- Performance reviews
- Feedback and appraisals
- Relationship alignment

The list is endless, and the opportunities can either be tackled by using a highly structured approach, or by adopting a coaching leadership approach. In the latter, be aware that superficially the discussion might sound like a normal conversation and the term coaching might not be used. This is far more pervasive and perhaps more important, because it is the continuous awareness and employment of the underlying principles of coaching during the many brief daily interactions that occur between leaders and their people at work that results in on-the-job development. It is to this coaching style that we turn in the next chapter.