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Improving Practices

Coaching in Pharma:

*Valuable Business Skill
or Temporary Fad?*

Essential tips for pharmaceutical managers

by Allan M Mackintosh, BSc, FInstSMM, DipCM



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Coaching in Pharma

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Coaching in Pharma:

Valuable Business Skill or Temporary Fad?

Allan M Mackintosh

Executive summary

The distinction between management and coaching is currently a hot topic across all industries. The recent explosion of accredited life coaches has been followed by efforts to ensure that the principles of coaching transfer to the world of business. The pharmaceutical industry is no exception. The question remains, can pharmaceutical managers use coaching skills to motivate their staff and improve performance?

A good coach aims to enhance performance through feedback, motivation, listening and questioning. Yet coaching is not always the ideal method; sometimes directive management is more appropriate. However, there are many opportunities for pharmaceutical managers to adopt coaching skills: field visits, progress reviews, team meetings and individual appraisals all benefit from the coaching philosophy.

This *Improving Practices* review provides advice and guidance for pharmaceutical managers looking to develop the art of coaching. It defines the differences between coaching and managing, and explains how successful managers require a balance of skills. It looks at the GROW and OUTCOMES® frameworks for coaching, and demonstrates how teams can grow and become more productive through an understanding of these approaches. It also looks at the major requirements of any training programme designed for coaches.

The review concludes that coaching is an essential business skill, and that the 'directive' approach eventually leads to managerial suicide. Coaching is not a modern fad, but a vital component of good management.

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Introduction



There continues to be massive coverage in the press about how effective the skill of coaching can be, both in the workplace and in people's personal lives. Life coaching is fast becoming popular and, in response, there has been a recent 'explosion' of accredited life coaches being churned out by various Life Coach Training Schools. But, what about using the skill of coaching in business? Can a pharmaceutical manager employ coaching skills to further the performance, general motivation and morale of his/her employees?

Used correctly, coaching can indeed transform an employee's performance and ensure that employees remain motivated and loyal to their manager and company. Managers who coach effectively tend to have more stable, motivated and productive teams.

But it is essential to point out that coaching is only one part of the pharmaceutical manager's role. The challenge is to ensure that all the differing aspects of management are built into that role. Promoting the skill of coaching may be worthwhile, but without the other aspects of management, a manager would not be fully effective.

Recruitment, performance management, financial management, business planning and customer engagement are just a few of the skills that a pharmaceutical manager requires in order to be successful. A manager must get the right balance of all skills to succeed. Being a successful coach does not guarantee managerial success.

Managers often struggle to cope with coaching, both in terms of taking the skills on board and also in taking the time to put them into practice. Training courses help provide initial exposure to the skill, although there is often a lack of qualified coaching follow-up support available after a course has been completed. Without follow-up many managers will revert to their old 'directive' ways, particularly when under pressure or stress.

In summary, coaching is an essential business skill. Many managers do not possess the appropriate skills or do not use them as often as they should. Coaching is only part of the manager's role and should be used in balance with other skills. Managers should fully understand what coaching is about and what it entails before embarking on using these skills.

There are plenty of opportunities to coach in a manager's everyday role. This review explores the basics.

Allan Mackintosh

July 2006

About the author

Allan Mackintosh is a Training and Development Professional with over 23 years of experience in industry. The years he spent in the pharmaceutical industry have given him experience as a sales executive, sales manager, sales coach and trainer. He latterly spent 6 years working as a Manager/Development Coach with GlaxoWellcome and GlaxoSmithKline, before branching out to form his own management coaching business in 2001. His last industry role involved coaching top-flight sales executives, first-line and senior managers, and providing support to enable them to identify and achieve their business objectives. Particular emphasis was placed on supporting new managers who had been promoted to management from the sales function.

In May 2001, Allan founded Performance Management Coaching Scotland to promote the skill of coaching in management, and to enable and support managers to become great coaches in the workplace. Since starting Performance Management Coaching, Allan has steadily grown 'The Coaching Manager' brand and it now covers a book and three unique coaching models, in addition to an e-zine, e-book and several structured courses; details are available from his website (www.pmcscotland.com).

Allan can be contacted on 00 44 776 416 8989 or at allan@pmcscotland.com, and is always keen to hear from readers about their experiences.

Coaching in Pharma:

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The challenge of coaching for performance

The concept of coaching has become a major challenge for industry, but as Sir John Whitmore wrote in his book *Coaching for Performance*,¹ the current appetite for it does not always yield success. "The hunger for coaching has resulted in hastily and inadequately trained managers, or so-called coaches, failing to meet the expectations of those they are coaching," says Sir John Whitmore. "In too many cases they have not fully understood the performance-related, psychological principles on which coaching is based...."

How true! And in my own case, in my early managerial days, how very true! I was thrown into coaching at a time of extreme organisational change. Training was given and although some of it stuck, the majority of it was lost beneath the company's task-oriented culture. It wasn't until I experienced expert coaching from an independent coach that I realised the value of good coaching. After 13 years, and numerous managers, it really did change the way I looked at life and also the way I approached it. I also became far more productive than I had been previously.

The longest journey starts with the first steps. So, with regards to coaching what should these be? You need first to clarify in your own mind exactly what coaching is in a management context.

*Good coaches are self-aware;
they listen intently, question
appropriately and challenge
assumptions and actions*

There are, of course, coaches in sport, and sometimes that is where the initial confusion starts. A lot of sports coaches are actually not true coaches, but trainers. Trainers tend to shout a lot, they direct and pass on advice, usually based on their own knowledge and experience. Good coaches are self-aware; they listen intently, question appropriately and challenge assumptions and actions. They will direct, but only when appropriate, and they only use their own knowledge and experience when they know it will move their employees forward.

One of the main differences between a good coaching manager and a directive trainer/manager is that a

coaching manager does not make judgements and does not let ego get in the way! Coaching aims to enhance the performance of others through feedback, motivation, effective listening and questioning. Above all, coaching aims to enable employees to do things for themselves, promoting positive action that leads to success.

A good manager will realise that coaching should not be used in every employee-manager interaction and that, depending on the employee's motivation and skill level, sometimes more directive approaches should be used. However, in order to coach effectively, managers must learn to listen more and be prepared to ask questions to gain full understanding as opposed to jumping to conclusions. They must also learn to 'hold their tongue' and not dive in with advice.

There are many opportunities for pharmaceutical managers to use coaching skills. A sales manager will carry out field visits (sometimes called 'support' or 'progress' visits) and within these the manager can use coaching skills to support the salesperson to build sales skills and also to enhance their influencing skills with customers. Progress reviews, development meetings, team meetings and annual appraisals are other examples of where good coaching skills can come to the fore and ensure the motivation and progression of the person being coached. Managers who say they do not see the opportunity for coaching, or perhaps don't have the time for it, need coaching themselves!

When coaching is needed, the capable manager should be able to utilise coaching models such as GROW and OUTCOMES® in order to coach effectively.

GROW and OUTCOMES®: frameworks for coaching

GROW

Many pharmaceutical managers are now being taught to coach their employees by using the standard coaching model, GROW:

- G – the Goal to be achieved
- R – the Reality of the present situation
- O – Options available
- W – Wrap up and/or Will.

Constructed by Graham Alexander and championed by Sir John Whitmore,¹ GROW is a well-established coaching model and an excellent 'starter' to enable

managers to get used to using a structure for coaching. So, how can we make the GROW model really work for the manager and the direct report? First, it is important to put time in. It could be that the coaching session takes an hour but it could also take a lot less depending on the topic, idea or issue being discussed.

G – Goal

Take time to fully explore exactly what your employee is trying to achieve. Check the realism of his/her goal. If what the employee is trying to achieve is beyond his/her capabilities, or outside budgets, then help the employee to think again about a more realistic target. You may have to work hard here to continue to motivate the individual and perhaps only longer term can their dreams and aims become a reality!

Make sure their objectives are C-SMART:² Challenging, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

R – Reality

Check exactly where the person being coached is at present in relation to his/her goals or objectives. Be prepared to challenge and give feedback where necessary here. I have worked with some people whose grasp of reality in relation to where they are exactly with an objective is suspect! Some people actually need to be told that they are maybe not as far ahead as they think they are. Having said that, some people are actually further ahead than they think they are. The trick here is not to tell them outright where specifically they are but to enable them to realise that for themselves!

O – Options

Don't settle for the first option that comes into the direct report's head. Explore, explore, explore. Help them come up with a few options and then test each option by taking time to investigate the pros and cons of each. Then get them to make a decision – THEIR decision – as to which is best for them. I put this in capitals because this is an area in which it is possible for managers to manipulate their reports – the manager can decide in their own head the best way forward and then 'lead' the employee to think that this option is best for them. Managers have to take risks here and let the person try the option that they believe is the best way forward. Otherwise, if you manipulate the person, in effect, to do the manager's bidding, then you must ask whether the employee has the motivation to carry out that option? This is the area where I have seen potentially good coaching managers fall down. They explore and identify goals well, they support their people to investigate their options, and then they manipulate in order to get the person to carry out the option the manager is most comfortable with. Don't do it – take a risk. I have been coached in this way on occasion and, believe me, it is not the most motivational way forward.

W – Wrap up and/or Will

Some books just mention that W stands for 'WRAP UP', in that this is the step where you summarize everything.

You would reinforce the goal or objective, the steps necessary to achieve that goal and the timescales needed to achieve each step. I prefer to add WILL to this, as I believe that you can WRAP UP and go, but, just maybe, the person being coached has not fully bought in to what they are going away to do. You must check this, and here you must have the awareness to identify whether the motivation is really what it should be. Be aware of body language, of voice tone. Ask the employee to tell you on a scale of 1–10 (where 1 is 'not motivated at all' and 10 is 'really buzzing, can't wait to get started') how motivated they are to go away and carry out the necessary steps that you have agreed. Feel for where they are. Be prepared to challenge if your feelings are such that you detect a lack of motivation.

Very competent managers and coaches can use the GROW model effectively by taking time and ensuring depth at each of the four stages, but busy managers or less competent managers and coaches tend to 'skip' stages, which can often result in the following scenarios:

- Accepting goals or objectives without checking the validity of the reasons behind them.
- Not fully understanding the performance gap between the present situation and the desired outcome.
- Not fully exploring the options phase, meaning that only a few options, often the more traditional ones, are highlighted.
- Not spending enough time checking the motivation of the employee to move actions forward or discussing how the manager is going to provide onward support.

GROW provides an excellent structure but may not provide enough discipline for busy managers to ensure adequate depth of understanding and support.

The OUTCOMES[®] coaching model

The OUTCOMES[®] coaching model³ has been designed to enable managers and sales managers to undertake more structured and productive coaching sessions with their employees than perhaps they have previously experienced. The increased levels of structure will result in more depth to their coaching and will lead to an increase in understanding, motivation and commitment to action than they may have experienced with coaching models such as GROW.

OUTCOMES[®] provides more structure than GROW simply because there are more distinct stages to which a manager or coach must adhere. The initial reaction from most managers I have introduced OUTCOMES[®] to has been one of initial frustration in that, as it has more distinct stages to go through and check, it can take more time to implement. However, once the managers understand the reasons for the extra steps and the fact that if they use the model carefully they will get good results, the managers have warmed to the model.

There are eight stages behind OUTCOMES®:

- O – Objectives
- U – Understanding
- T – Take stock
- C – Clarify the gap
- O – Options generation
- M – Motivate to action
- E – Enthusiasm and encouragement
- S – Support.

I am going to guide you through the model by way of a 'coaching conversation' between Mary, the manager, and Jonathan, the employee.

O – Objectives

It is important that the objective for the coaching session is established at the outset. What are the specific reasons for the meeting and what exactly would the employee want to achieve as a result of the coaching session? In all situations it is vital that a desired outcome or objective for the session is identified and the manager must take time to fully establish exactly what is to be achieved. Only that way can the coaching session be measured in terms of its effectiveness.

It is important that the objective for the coaching session is established at the outset

Questions for the manager to ask include:

- What would you like to discuss?
- What would you like to get out of the session?
- What specifically do you want to achieve in this session?
- How specifically can I support you?
- How will you know that we have achieved our objectives for this session?

Be careful when accepting outcomes or objectives that cannot be realised within the course of the coaching session. Sometimes employees can come up with weird and wonderful challenges and ideas, and many expect solutions from one coaching session. Manage their expectations and break down the challenge or idea into manageable 'chunks' so that you achieve something in every session on the way to achieving the overall objective. Some objectives need to be broken down this way into smaller objectives and actions before the overall objective is realised.

Let's start our coaching conversation between Mary and Jonathan.

Jonathan was a new employee and was attending his first review session with Mary, his line manager. Mary had contracted well with Jonathan in terms of how they were going to work together and she had also outlined that one purpose of the review sessions was for Jonathan to use Mary's coaching skills to support him to find solutions to any challenges and ideas that he had within his role. Jonathan's mindset, based on previous experience of managers, was that this 'one-to-one' was really just an opportunity for the manager to 'check up' on what he had been doing. Jonathan did have an issue in that he was way behind with a report which was due to be handed in to another manager the following week, and he was nowhere near finishing it.

At the start of the meeting, Mary again outlined the aims of the one-to-one meeting and then started the OUTCOMES® process by establishing what Jonathan's objectives were for the meeting:

- Mary:** *"What specifically would you like to achieve over the next half hour?"*
- Jonathan:** *"I thought I would bring you up to date with my overall progress."*
- Mary:** *"Anything in particular you would like support on?"*
- Jonathan:** *"I don't think so."*
- Mary:** *"If there was one thing in particular which would help your progress if you could find a better way forward, what would it be?"*
- Jonathan:** *"Well. I do have to get a report in by the end of next week and I am already behind schedule. I would like some support in getting this finished."*

U – Understanding

This stage is very important. It is vital that the coach fully understands the reasons behind why the person being coached wants to achieve a particular goal or objective. It also helps if the person being coached also fully understands why he/she wants to achieve the goal.

It is vital that the coach fully understands the reasons behind why the person being coached wants to achieve a particular goal or objective

You will find that on many occasions, employees identify objectives that they think the manager wants to hear. This happens if the employee has not fully committed to coaching and/or is suspicious of the manager's motives. Perhaps he/she sees the one-to-one review as an assessment rather than a developmental meeting. If this is the case, then the employee will tend to be defensive and not as open to learning as he/she should be.

A good coaching manager will seek to establish why an employee is looking to achieve a particular objective. Once this has been established it not only helps the manager to understand the employee's needs but also reinforces the employee's determination to achieve the objective.

Mary: *"This report that you have to get completed, tell me why it is important to you that you get this report done, and on time?"*

Jonathan: *"I am new to the company and I want to impress, so getting this report in on time shows that I am both keen and capable. If I don't get it in on time then there may be some questions asked about my capability and commitment."*

Let's stop the case study there. It would have been the easiest thing in the world for Mary to jump in and start giving advice as to how to finish the report. This is a typical manager's response. But Mary, by asking the question as to why it is important for Jonathan to get the report right and on time, is ensuring that Jonathan is identifying and reinforcing within himself the need to get the report right. He is now more open to Mary's coaching and Mary is now more aware of Jonathan's desire to get the report right.

T – Take Stock

The next stage of the OUTCOMES® model is to ensure that both parties have a complete understanding of where they are in relation to the overall objective. In Jonathan's case, this is to ensure that he has the tools and drive to complete the report.

Mary: *"So, Jonathan, it transpires that you have a report to finish by next week and you feel that you are slightly behind with this."*

Jonathan: *"Yes."*

Mary: *"How useful would it be if we worked on this together over the next half hour so that you go away from here confident and with further information that will enable you to complete the report?"*

Jonathan: *"Very useful."*

Mary: *"OK. Tell me more about exactly what stage you are at with the report."*

Jonathan: *"I have written the executive summary but I am struggling to find the information I need to complete the report."*

Mary: *"What information specifically do you feel you need?"*

Jonathan: *"I cannot find the sales data for Product X from the last 3 years."*

Mary: *"If you were able to access these data would this be sufficient to complete the report?"*

Jonathan: *"Well, yes. Although I may also need a bit of support in preparing the graphs."*

Mary: *"If we got you support to be able to prepare the graphs, would this mean you could now complete the report?"*

Jonathan: *"Yes."*

Mary: *"OK. So, basically you have a report to finish by the end of next week and in order to do this you need to access 3-year sales data for Product X and learn how to prepare graphs?"*

Jonathan: *"Yes."*

Mary has now established the current situation. They have both taken stock. Mary must now establish and clarify the exact gap that has to be closed.

C – Clarify the Gap

It is important that the manager now fully establishes exactly what has to be done in order for the employee to realise his/her objective. Let's follow Mary's coaching with Jonathan.

Mary: *"Jonathan, exactly what sales figures do you require to finish this report?"*

Jonathan: *"I need sales per year, quarter and month, along with growth and market share. I need to present these data graphically. I would like to include decent line graphs and pie charts but don't know where to start."*

Mary: *"Anything else you would like or need?"*

Jonathan: *"Perhaps some help in putting the report into a professional-looking binder."*

Mary: *"OK. So, if we can enable you to get the figures that you require plus support to prepare the graphs and present the report professionally, you will have achieved your outcome?"*

Jonathan: *"Absolutely."*

Mary is now at the stage where the outcome has been defined, the reasons established and the exact amount that has to be done identified. Mary must now ensure that she continues to coach Jonathan appropriately as opposed to just telling him where to get all the information/help he requires.

O – Options generation

Mary: *"In terms of the sales figures, what have you done so far in attempting to get these?"*

Jonathan: *"I looked at the Sales Department's recent communication but it only gives figures for the last 6 months. I need 3 years' worth. I left voicemail messages and sent an email but to no avail."*

Mary: *"Where else could you try?"*

Jonathan: *"I could speak to IT, I suppose. They should have all the data on file somewhere."*

Mary: *"Anything else you could do?"*

Jonathan: *"I really should chase up the Sales guys. I actually don't like not receiving a reply to messages that I have left!"*

Mary: *"What about learning how to prepare the graphs?"*

Jonathan: *"IT as well?"*

Mary: *"Could be! You may also find that both IT and the Sales people will have the capability to show you how to present your report. So, where are you now with a way forward?"*

Jonathan: *"I am going to chase up the Sales guys again, perhaps even go over to their department as opposed to leaving voicemails or emails. I will also check with IT."*

Mary: *"And the graphs and binding?"*

Jonathan: *"I will check with both these departments as well in relation to the graphs and the binding."*

M – Motivate to action

The temptation will be for many managers to leave the coaching conversation at this point but it is important that you check the motivation and capability of the person to carry out the tasks. Otherwise the action may not happen.

Mary: *"Great. How confident do you feel about approaching these departments?"*

Jonathan: *"Now you mention it, I don't really know anyone there and, as I am new, they will not know me. So I suppose, not as confident as I would like."*

Mary: *"What do you need to make you feel more confident?"*

Jonathan: *"Perhaps a personal introduction? Or even if I could just use your name?"*

Mary: *"Sure. Just say I sent you over and you are probably best to seek out James in IT and Sally in Sales."*

E – Enthusiasm and encouragement

At this stage the employee should be motivated to action and now it needs some reinforcement from the manager.

Mary: *"I am pleased with your progress Jonathan since you have been with us. Keep up the good work and thanks for the effort that you are putting in."*

This doesn't take long to say, but it can be worth a lot to an employee to hear these words. Sadly, too many managers fail at this juncture. Very few managers actually offer any form of support. The final stage of

the OUTCOMES® model is to ensure that support is discussed.

S – Support

Mary: *"Is there any way I can be of support in enabling you to complete the report?"*

Jonathan: *"At this stage I have all the information I need to move forward. If, though, I can't contact James or Sally for whatever reason, can I give you a call?"*

Mary: *"Sure. But try these people and their departments first. I am sure they will help you out."*

And so, by the end of our coaching conversation we have a situation where the employee, Jonathan, who arrived with an issue, has left with action and motivation. He also has the satisfaction of knowing that his manager is there if he ever needs support.

Obviously it is not always this simple. There will, of course, be situations where the coaching conversation will be more complex. However, I hope that this example gives you a flavour of how to use the OUTCOMES® coaching model.

Implementing coaching in organisations: five essential steps

I have been fortunate enough to be actively and heavily involved in the implementation of a 2-year-long company-wide coaching programme, both as an employee who was to receive coaching but also as a manager and coach who was expected to regularly coach my direct reports and peers to enable them to achieve their objectives. I say fortunate enough, because I found that when I was coached effectively I became really motivated and focused, and when I finally became a proficient coach, I again found it motivational in that I was able to support and enable my direct reports to achieve more.

There are, however, many pitfalls along the way to achieving total acceptance of coaching as a skill that not only motivates employees but also enables them to become more capable and productive. There are some necessary steps an organisation must take in order to ensure that they implement a coaching programme effectively. Looking back now to that 2-year programme, I feel that although we made great progress we also made some mistakes that I would encourage organisations to be aware of when deciding to go down the coaching route. There are five essential steps to consider when implementing a coaching programme (Table 1).

1. Ensure that coaching starts at the top and is supported by the top
2. Ensure that everybody understands what coaching is and what it can do for them
3. Ensure that those who are going to act as coaches are trained effectively
4. Ensure that those who are doing the coaching have some form of measure
5. Regularly review progress against agreed measurement and success criteria

Table 1. The five essential factors to consider when implementing a coaching programme.

1. Ensure that coaching starts at the top and is supported by the top

Many organisations are recognising that coaching is a skill that all managers of people and teams must possess. However, many organisations concentrate on training only first- and, possibly, second-line managers in the skill. This results in middle or junior managers becoming skilled in coaching but never experiencing the power of coaching from their own senior management. In relation to ensuring that everyone who will be involved in the coaching programme 'buys-in' to the philosophy they need to hear that senior executives are committed to coaching, both in terms of promoting the skill and also in utilising the skill themselves. In other words everybody has to 'walk the talk'.

In my last organisation before I went self-employed this was not the case. A few senior members of the Board and a couple of key human resource personnel promoted the skill of coaching well and practised what they preached. Unfortunately, some very senior managers did not and continued to use very directive behaviours towards their staff whilst communicating that coaching was a fad that would soon pass! This caused confusion at middle management levels, with the result that a number of managers did not take their coaching training very seriously. Fortunately, other managers did and their teams eventually experienced the benefit.

2. Ensure that everybody understands what coaching is and what it can do for them

This was one of the first hurdles we had to overcome. Many people did not understand why the organisation was implementing such a programme and could not fully comprehend exactly what coaching was. Some believed it was training and that all it meant was that you told people what to do and showed them how to do it. After all, that was what their sports coaches did!

Others thought coaching was more about counselling and that it was to be used only when there was a deep problem causing underperformance. All in all, not everyone had a good understanding of how

coaching differed from the likes of training, mentoring or counselling. Since many had not been exposed to effective coaching, they had no experience or idea of why coaching could be of benefit to them, either as a coach or as someone being coached. Before employees can move on and take part in a coaching programme they must be 100% aware of what the skill of coaching entails and what it can do for them.

3. Ensure that those who are going to act as coaches are trained effectively

Most companies will take on the services of a training provider or consultant to support them in implementing a coaching programme. Beware. Make sure you do your homework! There are numerous coaching schools, training companies and consultancies that now offer coach training. Some will be excellent; some not so hot. We had some major problems with the group that we used in that not all their trainers/coaches had the necessary skills and experience, which meant that not everyone in the organisation received the same quality of training and coaching. I was extremely lucky in that I had an excellent coach who was also a fantastic trainer.

So, with this in mind, what should you look for when selecting a coach training company or consultancy? It is vitally important, when selecting a provider, to ensure that you are comfortable with the company, and that together you can form a powerful and productive partnership. There are a number of questions you should be asking in order to ascertain this:

- What is the provider's experience of supporting coach programmes? (Years of experience, types of situations, companies worked with, references.)
- What experience do the provider's individual consultants have? Business backgrounds? Coaching experience? Coaching qualifications? Any experts within the ranks? There are a lot of life coaches now offering corporate manager coach training who do not come from a corporate background. Although this does not mean they won't be good coaches, it may mean that their credibility in the eyes of the trainees/coachees might not be all it could be, and this could present problems.
- What coaching models does the provider use? Does the provider stick to one model or are the provider's consultants able to utilise a number of coaching models that they can adapt to the purchaser's needs?
- How flexible is the provider? It is all very well putting together a coaching programme to satisfy an initial proposal but is the provider able to flex this programme as befits the needs of the purchaser? Flexibility is key in any coaching programme, as not everything will go to plan and not everybody will progress at the same pace.

- Does the provider offer a variety of interventions within the programme? A good provider will ensure that the programme is varied, with a mix of classroom theory, role-play and other experiential practices, together with assignments, action plans, review days (not forgetting one-to-one reviews) and group and telephone coaching support.
- Is the provider prepared to ensure that it measures its success, and agree with you how to measure that success? If not, then avoid this provider.
- Is the provider affordable? Some companies and consultancies charge very high rates, deliver excellence and are value for money. Some charge very reasonable rates and are also excellent. The main point is that you should ensure that you can afford the programme because its effects could last a fairly long time, particularly if you are a large organisation.

Coach training takes time, and although there are some very good 2–3-day courses available, the real secret to establishing and reinforcing coaching skills is to ensure that, once the basic theory is learned, these skills are immediately put into practice. A good coach training provider will always offer follow-up support in the form of review days, one-to-one coaching, group coaching (action learning sets) and telephone coaching support. If your managers and coaches do not get the required and proper training then the whole coaching programme could collapse before your very eyes.

A good coach training provider will always offer follow-up support

4. Ensure that those who are doing the coaching have some form of measure

In my experience, not everyone who goes through coach training is prepared to go away and start coaching! Reasons for this are varied. Some cite pressure of work and not enough time, others simply state that they don't believe coaching would work for their reports. Some state that they are already coaching, whereas others decide that they need to coach more because they now believe that this is the way to motivate and up-skill their staff. Clearly, some managers have a strong motivation to coach, others do not. So, how do you get around this challenge? In my last organisation, we got halfway there: every manager's measures of performance included an objective set around how much time would have to be spent on a one-to-one basis with individuals in their teams. This at least got people to make sure they put time in their diaries in order for this to happen. However, this was only half the battle as it was no guarantee that within this dedicated time the manager would actually do any coaching! What should happen is that the manager, on a regular basis, should ask for feedback on his/her

coaching skills from his/her coachees. Each coachee should have a list of the competencies and behaviours that an excellent coach should exhibit. Only by taking both the objective and feedback approach will you ensure that coaching is taken seriously.

5. Regularly review progress against agreed measurement and success criteria

Finally, the success of the coaching programme overall should be measured. As with any training intervention it is not always easy to measure how successful an intervention has been. Sure, the feedback following the course was great and the trainer/coach was superb, but was there any lasting change and did the programme result in improved behaviours and a subsequent improvement in productivity?

The success of the coaching programme overall should always be measured

Organisations should look at both qualitative and quantitative measures wherever possible. Qualitative measures include written feedback about how the coachee or employee feels about the coaching:

- Do they feel more focused, more motivated?
- Has morale improved?
- Do they look forward to their coaching sessions?

Qualitative measures, though, do not always satisfy senior management who, in many respects, do not respect 'happy sheet' feedback. What they want is hard evidence based on data and results. If they do not get this then suspicion about how effective the intervention has been often occurs and future investment in soft skill ventures can be difficult to obtain.

Where possible if you are looking to demonstrate a return on investment then you should look at measuring outputs such as sales or production, or sickness and employee retention rates, together with improvements in individual competency ratings where possible. We were constantly being pressured and challenged to prove a return on the huge investment that the company had made, and although we struggled in the early days to prove that coaching worked we eventually gathered together enough quantitative data to prove our case.

Another important point is that all this takes time. If you think you can implement a coaching programme in a matter of weeks then think again. You will need time to get the support of senior management, time to put a training plan together and then time to implement that plan. Then there should be a reinforcement and sustainability period during which the newly found

skills are being implemented and developed through feedback. Time should also be put aside to ensure feedback is collected and measurement against the success criteria is monitored and communicated. Allow at least 6 months to a year for your implementation and then be prepared to assess and develop skills on an ongoing basis.

Coaching programmes are lengthy and can be exhausting given the continual training, monitoring and influencing of stakeholders, but ultimately they are very worthwhile as the organisation and its people grow as a result.

Coaching programmes are lengthy, but are ultimately worthwhile as the organisation and its people grow as a result

Conclusion

A manager who possesses only a 'directive' or a 'do as I say' approach will eventually commit managerial suicide by losing the respect and trust of his/her team. Managers must learn to coach and use their coaching skills appropriately and skilfully. In order to learn to coach properly, managers must start to learn to actively listen more, question more accurately, coach using a framework, and offer praise and support. Managers have many opportunities to support their team members through coaching, including field visits, one-to-one

reviews and appraisals. If they utilise these opportunities they will see their team members grow and become more productive.

Organisations can support their managers by ensuring that they implement a structured and comprehensive coaching development programme. One-off or 1–2-day coaching courses may seem to help initially, but if there is no follow-up, then there may be little return on the training investment.

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