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# 1

# What is Coaching?

*The term 'coaching' is often used to describe any form of training. Before learning how to coach, you firstly need to understand what coaching is, how you can use it to maximise an individual's potential and the benefits to the individual and the organization.*

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# Coaching in Sport

We are probably all familiar with the fact that top athletes and sports performers have coaches to help improve or maximize their performance, but do we know how they do what they do? How do they improve the performance of those they coach? Why, if they are so good, isn't the coach the one that is taking part and winning all the medals?

## Hot tip



If you coach a junior sports team, why not try practicing some of the skills you pick up from this book on them?

At the level most sports people are assigned a coach they are probably already well beyond the point where they need to learn basic skills or techniques. They may already be performing at the very highest level in their field of sport and could even be the world's number one in their chosen sport.

## Coaching to stay on top

At the point when an athlete sets a new world record or wins a major championship, does he or she sack the coach because there is nothing else to learn? Of course not – at this point the coach is probably of even more benefit to the performer.

Getting to the top may have been an incredible achievement but staying at the top can be an even bigger challenge. Once a performer has set a new standard of excellence there will undoubtedly be others close on their heels looking to better that achievement. By continually looking at areas to refine and improve, the coach can work with the performer to stay at the top for longer.

## The role of a coach

The coach has a critical role to play, supporting the performer and helping them to develop their full potential. Through effective and structured questioning techniques the coach can:

- Help the performer to focus on areas of performance that are going to make a difference
- Act as a sounding board for the performer's new ideas
- Provide independent feedback on performance
- Help the performer to become more self-aware
- Praise and encourage when they see improvements
- Test and challenge the performer's thinking
- Provide encouragement if things don't go so well

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## Not telling or selling

What you will note from this list is that it doesn't include 'tell the performer what to do'. This is the first critical lesson of coaching. It is not 'telling', 'advising' or, for that matter, 'selling' your views. It is about questioning to encourage the performer to focus their thinking so that they determine and act upon their own solutions.

## Sports coach or instructor?

Quite often in sport you will hear the terms 'instructor' and 'coach' used indiscriminately. We tend to talk about a ski instructor but refer to a football or basketball coach. As you will realize, the term 'coach' as we will be using it in this book has a very specific meaning and should not be confused with the roles played by many who are really trainers or instructors.

Don't forget



Coaching is a very different activity to instructing or training and uses different skills and techniques.



## The mind game

Most top sports people who are competing at the highest level are likely to be concentrating less on developing basic skills and more on the psychology of their performance. What makes the difference between a good performer and the very best is often more about what is going on in the performer's mind.

The coach can help the performer by ensuring they approach their sport with a positive and focused mindset, eliminating any thoughts they may have of failure.

# The Coach in Business

Although the environments may seem very different, the role of the coach in the business environment is very similar to that of the coach in the world of sport. The business coach is still interested in getting the very best performance from the individual – whether the business performer is a sales person, a creative writer, a finance manager or a company director.

## Beware



Don't be tempted to come up with the goals for your performer. We will see how beneficial it is to get them to come up with their own goals.

## Different coaching goals

Of course the skills being focused on in the business context are most likely going to be very different, as are the outcomes. Instead of having the goal of becoming a world record holder in the javelin or achieving a personal best in the high jump, the goals may be to successfully manage a first IT project, achieve this year's sales target or to become an effective delegator.

## The coach as manager

Quite often the coach in business is also the individual's manager and clearly this is a different situation to most sports coaches who are often independent from the performer's manager.

The enhanced relationship developed through coaching can be very helpful in terms of the day-to-day management of an individual and is one of the key benefits of using coaching. This is something we will be exploring later in this book.



# Benefits of Coaching

Coaching, when carried out effectively, is one of the most powerful ways to enhance an individual's personal effectiveness. Often it has many benefits over more traditional methods of development such as training courses, workshops or direct instruction.

Because the coach is using probing questioning to draw out solutions from the performer, we will see that it:

- Enables the performer to better understand themselves through challenging questioning and also helps them to focus on the most important things
- Allows the coach to gain a better understanding of the performer which can result in a better working relationship between the two
- Leaves the responsibility for development with the performer which can lead them to be more motivated to achieve their desired outcomes
- Gives the performer confidence to tackle this and other issues – once they have the correct mindset they can apply this thinking to a range of other situations
- Provides more focused development in specific areas rather than providing one-size-fits-all solutions
- Encourages more creative and personalized solutions which are based on the individual's needs
- Ultimately leads to real and lasting improvement in the performer's performance

## No need to be an expert

Drawing solutions from the performer also means that the coach does not have to be as knowledgeable or skilful as the performer in the subject being coached. Some level of understanding of the topic can sometimes be helpful but the coach's role is to help the performer to determine their own solutions, not to come up with all the answers.

This explains why a coach doesn't necessarily need to be as good as or better than the performer. They just need to be an excellent coach.

**Don't forget**



You don't have to be an expert in the topic being coached – you just have to be an excellent coach.

# Coaching Styles

Before looking at coaching in detail we need to firstly provide some background on coaching styles. Coaching styles follow the same principles as those used for leadership. Examining these will help to ensure you adopt the most effective style when coaching.

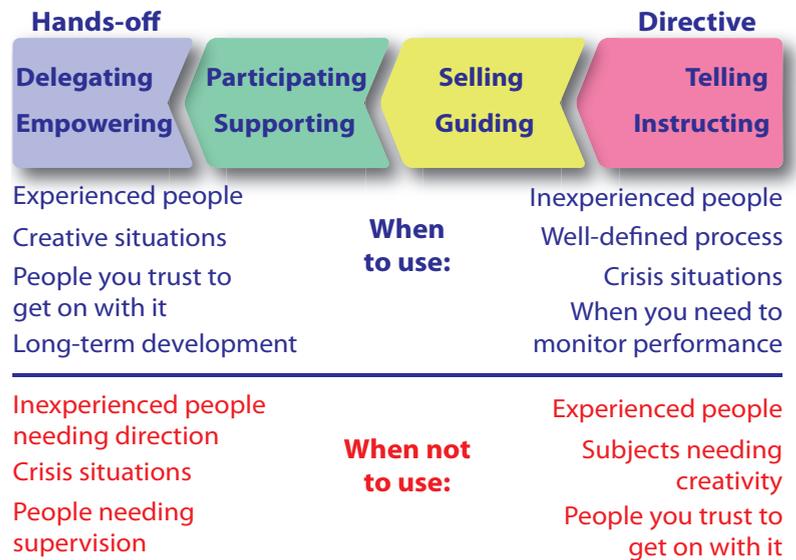
## Leadership styles

As managers we must choose our leadership style to suit the situation and the experience of the individual – this is a well established concept. At one extreme we can choose to use a directive or ‘tell’ approach and, at the other, an empowering or hands-off style. The following diagram describes this and under what circumstances each may be appropriate:

### Hot tip



If you are interested in finding out more about leadership styles, refer to Chapter 10 for some additional resources on the subject.



## A style for all situations

You will realize from this diagram there are no right or wrong styles of leadership but that some styles just suit certain situations better than others. Conversely there are some styles which are less appropriate and even unhelpful in certain situations.

Although the diagram describes the styles at each end of the leadership spectrum, you should note this is a continuous scale. There are also many other styles of leadership you can adopt to suit situations around the middle ground where less monitoring and instruction is needed and where supporting becomes helpful.

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## Adapting your style

Everyone has a dominant style of leadership – one which they will normally tend to adopt. This only becomes a problem if a manager only ever uses this one style. It may be a very appropriate style for most situations and with certain individuals but, occasionally, this style could actually be unhelpful or even demotivating. For example, telling a highly competent and experienced person precisely how to do a task could be very demotivating and even patronizing.

The trick is identifying your dominant style and then learning to be flexible enough to adapt your approach to any of the other styles when faced with a situation that requires it.

## Coaching style

In most cases coaching is used to enhance or refine skills or behaviors the performer is already familiar with and is most likely already using. These skills may have been acquired through traditional training, have been self-taught or learnt through trial and error. Where your performer is experienced in the subject you will normally be able to adopt a coaching style towards the hands-off and empowering end of the style spectrum.

## Hands-off coaching style

Here are some other reasons why, when coaching, you will normally be able to adopt a hands-off style:

- As well as already having some level of experience, your performer is also hopefully someone who you can trust to work without having to be continually pushed or monitored
- Some of the solutions you will want to encourage your performer to come up with may require some creativity rather than relying on your own tried and tested solutions
- Most areas you will be looking to coach are ones that will benefit from long-term solutions rather than quick fixes

Using a hands-off coaching style means questioning your performer to help them focus on priority areas. It also means encouraging them to come up with their own solutions rather than telling them what to do and encouraging them to set and monitor their own goals – this is far more motivating for your performer.

Don't forget



We all have a dominant leadership style but must also learn to adopt other styles when the situation requires it.

# Levels of Learning

Another important concept to understand before getting into the detail of coaching is the relationship between knowledge, skills and behaviors and how coaching impacts each of these different levels of learning. To illustrate each we will take as a scenario the activity of learning to drive a car.

## Beware



Just because someone learns the theory doesn't necessarily mean that they can apply that knowledge. They must still develop the skills to become proficient.

## Knowledge

Before even thinking about driving for the first time there is a certain amount of information we need to know. This may be very basic knowledge such as: What do each of the pedals do? How do I turn on the ignition? What is the difference between the hand brake and the foot brake? What are the rules of the road? All of this is background knowledge that will help us when we try to actually drive.

## Skills

Just because we have learnt the necessary knowledge, however, does not automatically make us skilled drivers. So, having acquired the necessary knowledge, we then need to learn how to apply this knowledge by learning the skills to drive. Skills require application and practice and cannot therefore be learnt by merely reading about them.

## Behaviors

Interestingly, people all start by learning the same knowledge and practicing roughly the same skills but over time people then develop their own behaviors. There are people who drive carefully, others more aggressively and some without a care in the world. It is important to note that some behaviors can positively support our skills and lead to better performance whereas others may have a negative impact on our performance of these skills.



# What can be Coached?

As we have already stated, coaching is particularly useful as a way of refining or further developing existing skills or behaviors. Given that coaching is normally based on an ongoing relationship or series of meetings, it lends itself to areas of development where long-lasting change is required or where development is best tackled gradually over a period of time. For this reason coaching is particularly useful for areas such as:

- Assertiveness and confidence
- Influencing
- Effective questioning and listening
- Thinking strategically
- Creating a balance between work and personal lives
- Sales behaviors and skills
- Personal organization or time management

Take the first example in the above list. Very few people would expect that by attending a single training course or workshop on the subject of confidence their deep-seated lack of confidence would be transformed forever – however good the course was.

## Long term solution

A course is likely to be attended by a number of delegates and therefore any solutions are going to be broad-brush and not specific to an individual. Furthermore, it is unlikely that a single event will turn around behaviors and thinking habits, which may have built up over a number of years, without ongoing support and reinforcement only really possible through regular and ongoing coaching.

## Ongoing relationship

An important distinction between coaching and any other form of training is that it is not a one-off event. It is an ongoing process where the coach and performer can progressively work on one or a number of focused areas of personal development.

The number of coaching sessions needed will vary but could spread over several weeks, months or even years in some cases depending on the issue being coached.

### Hot tip



If faced with someone with a long-term development issue don't just put them on a training course – think about coaching them instead.

**Hot tip**

Experienced employees who have been on all the training courses will find coaching far more useful for developing their specific needs.

## To Coach or Not to Coach?

### More focused development

If you have ever scanned through brochures offering training courses or workshops you will see that the subjects covered are relatively broad. They are generally designed to appeal to a wide range of potential delegates looking for broad-based training on a given subject.

Coaching, on the other hand, allows the individual to focus on very specific development issues. This can be far more effective, especially for more experienced people who may have attended all the usual courses and do not want to waste a whole day to learn just one or two specific skills.

### When not to coach

Having considered the benefits of coaching and how useful it is for so many situations we need to look at the few occasions where coaching may not be an appropriate approach to take.

### In a crisis

When a short-term or instant solution is required it may be necessary to use other, more directive management solutions. For instance, if you were to discover a fire in a building it would not be the time to coach another individual into finding new, personalized solutions for getting out of the building! A simple, directive instruction would be far more effective.



### Coaching knowledge

Coaching as a means to acquire knowledge may not necessarily be the best option. For example, you may need to help an individual to understand about the internal structure of a computer. You could try asking your performer to come up with their own thoughts on, say, the workings of a microprocessor but, unless they know something about electronics in the first place, they will be merely guessing.

What is possible through coaching is to help an individual to determine *how* they are going to best find out and learn this information – coaching them in the skill of learning.

# The Alternatives

## Learning knowledge

We have just highlighted that coaching is not necessarily the solution for every development situation. Knowledge can be best acquired through a number of means. For example:

- Reading management or technical books or following a course of distance learning
- Searching the internet
- Attending lectures on the chosen subject

## Group learning

There are also times where core skills are best learned by being part of a group in a 'classroom' environment. This provides the opportunity to learn alongside others and discuss a subject together. It may also help where consistency of a specific methodology is important across an organization.

## Poor performance

There will be other occasions where coaching may not be an appropriate solution. Regrettably some behavior or poor performance issues may, ultimately need to be dealt with through formal disciplinary action – particularly if the behavior is disruptive and the individual is not in a mindset to want to engage in coaching.

## Coaching or counseling?

If you are already familiar with the concepts of counseling then you may be wondering what the difference is between coaching and counseling. Counseling is also a way of drawing out solutions from an individual without imposing them – helping and supporting the performer in making their own decisions.

Many of the skills are, indeed, very similar. One key difference is that coaching is more focused on a performance outcome, often related to work and life issues whereas counseling is more focused on psychological healing.

On a few occasions you may find that the coaching discussion strays more towards counseling. As a coach you need to understand the limitations of your skill-base. Where necessary, you may need to suggest that the person you are coaching seeks alternative help for their counseling need.

**Beware**



If your coaching starts to turn into counseling you may need to stop and recommend they seek alternative help with a counselor.

**Hot tip**

Coaching someone to get clarity over their career direction can be very helpful. We look at this in more detail in Chapter 9.

## Coaching Applications

On the following two pages we have provided more detailed examples where coaching can provide real benefit. Whilst this book focuses on business coaching we have also provided an example to show how coaching can be used very effectively in non-work situations. There are clearly many more applications:

### Business applications

- **Career development** – Supporting and developing an individual through their career is an ideal application for coaching. It can be used in the first place to help an individual get clarity over their overall career direction. Then regular ongoing coaching meetings can be used to support their development as they progress in their career.
- **Delegation** – The theory behind delegation is relatively straightforward but putting this into practice can sometimes lead to problems, particularly for newly appointed managers. New managers can feel awkward about having to delegate work for the first time (often to those who were previously their peers). Coaching can help to explore what lies behind their concerns and provide practical actions and regular support to help them build their confidence.
- **Managing meetings** – Standard courses on the subject of managing meetings provide a good theoretical grounding in the skills needed to run effective meetings. Putting these into practice requires the use of a number of supporting behaviors including personal organization, assertiveness, decision making and open-mindedness. All are behaviors that can be developed and supported through regular coaching with feedback from real meetings.



## ...cont'd

- **Selling** – There are possibly more training materials available on selling skills than any other business subject. Experienced salespeople will have been on many sales training programmes and as a result are unlikely to gain much from ‘refresher’ training. As with many activities, the mindset of the individual can also play a significant role in their success. Coaching allows you to explore with a salesperson very specific areas and create solutions focused on the precise needs of the individual.
- **Personal organization** – Many people struggle with what is often referred to as ‘time management’. In reality it could be a number of specific issues from poor organization, ineffective delegation, or a reluctance to say ‘no’ when over-worked. Solutions often require considerable coaching and support until new good habits become the natural way of doing things.
- **Negotiation** – The skills and tactics needed for negotiation can be learned through training but to be effective under the pressures of a real situation requires a number of supporting behaviors such as emotional control, tenacity and heightened communication skills. Coaching is an ideal way to support and develop someone in these behaviors.



## Non-work applications

- **Quitting smoking or drinking** – These are just two examples of activities for which coaching can play a part in trying to control or alter long-term and deep-seated habits. Clearly, where an individual has persistent or medical related issues, you should not interfere with any professional help they are seeking. Where, however, an individual chooses to cut down or stop their habit, you can play a vital role in helping them through coaching on a regular basis.

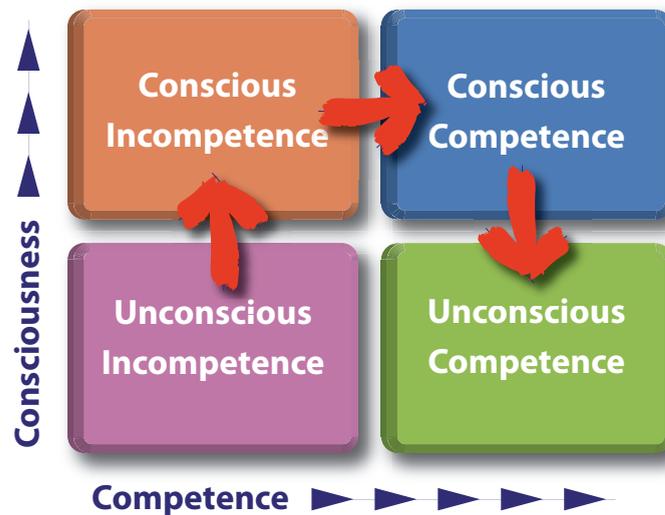
### Hot tip



Coaching is a good way to tackle people's long-term habits. However, you should not expect instant results – you may need to provide coaching support for many months.

# Learning Stages

We have already described the relationship between knowledge, skills and behaviors so finally in this chapter we will look briefly at a model which explains how people acquire skills and behaviors. This will be useful, not only so you can understand the progress of your performer's development but also so that, as you learn to become an effective coach, you can appreciate your own development stages towards becoming a fully competent coach.



As you will see, the skill development path breaks down into four stages. To illustrate each, we are going to turn, again, to our earlier example of learning to drive.

## Unconsciously incompetent

In this first stage, a learner is incapable of performing a skill but is also unconscious of what is required to perform the skill – they won't even be aware that they can't do it.

In terms of learning to drive, at an early age most children won't have any knowledge of what is really required to drive a car. They may watch adults driving but will not have any real comprehension of the background knowledge we described earlier such as the rules of the road or how to operate the controls.

An important point to note about this stage is that, unless an individual becomes aware of their incapability, they will have no motivation to do anything about it.

### Don't forget



Unless someone is aware of their lack of capability they will not be motivated to change.

...cont'd

### Consciously incompetent

This second stage of development occurs once the learner has understood the skills needed to perform a task but has not yet learned to use them.

When someone shows an interest in learning to drive, they may become more aware of the complexities of driving but they will not have had any lessons and are therefore still incapable. By reading and asking questions a learner picks up the background knowledge but has no experience of using the required skills.

### Consciously competent

This stage is reached when the learner first starts to practice using the new skills. They are able to perform the skills but are very conscious of what they are doing and still need to focus their attention on getting them right.

In our learning to drive example, the learner is now physically driving the car – maybe having lessons – but everything is still awkward and mechanistic. They will be very conscious, for instance, of their hands and feet and which pedals they need to press and when.

When a learner reaches this stage it is important that they don't give up just because everything feels awkward. Regular practice will take the learner to the next stage.

### Unconsciously competent

This is arguably the ideal state in terms of developing a skill as the individual is now capable of performing the skill and without even having to consciously think about it.

If you are an experienced driver you will recognise this state if you have ever driven whilst deep in thought and, having reached your destination, found you have almost no recollection of the journey. You will have been using your driving skills unconsciously!

We describe this as 'arguably' the ideal state because this last level of unconsciousness can lead to complacency. If you interact with others whilst giving no conscious consideration to your actions you are unlikely to be performing at your best. You should ideally have sufficient experience to apply the appropriate skills or behaviors unconsciously but still maintain a level of consciousness to ensure you are fully in control of how you apply them.

#### Hot tip



Don't worry if a learner feels awkward when first using a new skill – this will become more natural with practice.

## Summary

- Coaching in sport and in business is very similar – in both, the coach is trying to help the performer to maximise their potential
- A coach can help by providing support, encouragement, motivation and, above all, focus
- The role of the coach is to encourage the performer, through effective questioning, to think through their own solutions rather than to tell or advise them what to do
- As leaders, we all have a dominant leadership style. Whatever our leadership style, it is important to realize there are other styles which are sometimes more appropriate
- When coaching, the most used style is hands-off. This will empower the performer and ensure they remain motivated towards their personal development
- Coaching is an ideal way of enhancing existing skills and behaviors
- Coaching is generally an ongoing engagement and therefore lends itself to development needs requiring longer-term solutions
- Coaching should not be seen as the only development solution – there are times when other solutions may be more suitable
- The coach does not need to be as skilful as the performer, but they do need to be competent as a coach
- Coaching can help to strengthen the relationship between the performer and the manager
- It is difficult to use coaching to develop knowledge directly but it can be used to help someone develop the skills necessary to acquire knowledge
- If a subject is best handled by counseling know your limitations and, if necessary, recommend they seek counseling