How to Guide

Coach your people to performance

Purpose of this document.
This document contains information on how managers can use coaching to develop their people, reach their potential and boost their performance.

Coach your people to performance

As a manager being able to coach your team is a critical skill. Coaching allows people to learn, to come up with their own solutions and to own the outcome. You, as the manager, can use coaching to develop and empower your team.

Coaching as a management tool sits on the opposite side of command and control.

When you tell people what to do, they usually do the task, but they take no real ownership for the outcome. If they fail, it's easy to blame you (the person who told them what to do). In this way you will continuously need to take responsibility.

Coaching, on the other hand, assumes that people can create their own solutions. By asking questions, and skillfully probe for deeper understanding, the coach (or manager) can empower people to think for themselves, craft solutions that will work better and ultimately take responsibility for the outcome. It creates ownership and allows people the opportunity to develop their own skills.

Why people don't perform

While there are many reasons for non-performance, there are also many instances where people know what to do to solve a problem, but there are reasons that they don't. They might lack confidence to implement a solution, or they might not have thought through all the options. Sometimes people are stuck because of limiting assumptions they hold. Coaching is a way to uncover these reasons, shine a light on them and remove them as obstacles.

A note to the wise: It's easy to tell people what to do. If that has been your role as a manager, you might find it difficult to change that approach. But keep the prize in mind: empowered staff who think for themselves, take accountability and ownership and perform better. Ultimately it is about unlocking the potential in your people. It's definitely worth a try!

What is coaching?

Coaching is the process of asking insightful questions to help someone think through a problem or an issue. It is NOT giving advice, and it isn't mentoring. As a coach you become someone else's "thinking partner" by asking questions, allowing them time to think and reflect, probing for understand and insight and leading them to identifying solutions and actions.

Here is a list of skills that a coach should have:

Listening:	Active listening means not just listening to what is being said but listening for how it's said (the emotion or motivation) and what is not being said. It's not just waiting for your turn to speak. And you should never interrupt. During active listening your focus is continuously on the person talking. It takes energy and dedication, but it is a critical skill for any good coach. The quality of your listening directly correlates to the quality of the other person's thinking.
Asking questions:	A coach asks (mostly) open-ended questions. These questions are non-judgmental and designed to get the coachee thinking and reflecting. Don't use leading questions, and only use closed-ended questions if you need to test your understanding.
Summarising and paraphrasing:	A good coach will summarise what they have heard the person say or paraphrase the content. Use the person's actual words instead of replacing them with your own. When people hear their words repeated back to them it is a great reflection and test for understanding.
Self-awareness:	A coach is aware of their own emotions and thoughts at the same time being careful not to let these influence the coachee. Self-awareness can be developed by paying attention to your reactions, emotions and behaviour – be curious about it and use experiences during coaching to make sense of these.
Non-judgement:	A coach should not judge. As soon as we feel judged we go into defensive (or attach)-mode and that stops the higher order thinking. A coach should pay attention to when they feel the need to judge and manage that so that it doesn't influence the coaching discussion.

What does a coach set out to achieve?

Creating self-awareness – people can only change that of which they are aware. The role of the coach is to create awareness in the coachee so that they can question their assumptions, discover more options and choose an action.

Highlighting assumptions – we all have assumptions. Some are true, but many aren't. The role of a coach is to identify limiting assumptions that the coachee might have, highlighting these and getting the coachee to reflect on whether the assumption is still valid and useful. If it isn't the coach could ask the coachee to craft a new belief, one that is true and useful.

Note: limiting assumptions are usually prefaced by words such as "should" or "must". When you hear these probe for a limiting assumption by asking what the belief is, and whether it is useful and still valid.

Responsibility – in coaching the responsibility always lies with the coachee. Be aware of not taking responsibility as the coach because that will disempower the coachee and the coaching will most likely fail. As a manager you will need to be aware that your people must take responsibility for their solutions. If they don't, and it is seen as your idea, they will not take responsibility when it fails. Worse, they might blame you for the failure!

When do you coach?

There is no set time for coaching. You can coach during an informal discussion for a couple of minutes. You can use the performance review process as an opportunity to coach. You can set up formal coaching sessions with your employees. Anytime could be an opportunity to ask questions, reflect back, probe for deeper understanding and get people to come up with solutions.

There are times when coaching is not relevant. These could be in crises situations where clear and decisive behaviour is needed. When a building is on fire you're not going to coach people on what they think the best action is. You're going to get them out of there as fast as you can!

How do you coach?

John Whitmore wrote "Coaching for Performancev" and proposed the GROW model.

G – Goal

R – Reality

O – Options

W – Way forward

This is a practical structure for a coaching session. Download the template to use.

Goal

In this step you agree with the coachee what the conversation will achieve. Where do they want to be at the end of the session? What would they need to achieve? What would it look like? How can they tell that they have achieved it?

Ensure that the goal is clear, measurable, and achievable – use the SMART principles (specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and time-bound).

> Note: It's better to spend a bit more time on getting this section right, because the success of the whole conversation is dependent on this.

Reality

In this section the coach asks questions about the problem or issue that the coachee is facing. Focus on objective reality – what evidence is there to support the point of view? What is going on? What is the impact of that? What has already been tried?

Options

The Options section focuses on identifying opportunities and unlocking ideas. Listen out for limiting assumptions and question these. Use creative thinking to generate ideas and options that might not be immediately visible.

Way Forward

Now it is time to select the best options and ideas generated in the previous section. Focus on action plans and include who will do what by when. A great question here is to identify what will stop the coachee from taking action and discuss how these obstacles can be removed. Link it back to the goal that was identified at the beginning of the session.

In conclusion

Managers use coaching as an effective way to develop people, boost their performance and achieve their potential. The skills are easy to learn and with some effort and focus can become second nature. Coaching is what turns good managers into great managers.