

# Coaching for Exceptional Performance: Top Leadership Team & Direct Reports

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**“Executive Coaching is the most powerful process to drive measured and sustainable organisational change and overcoming the key barriers to change. To be an outstanding Coach, Manager and Leader is not easy. Trust me; it takes more than willpower and discipline to become exceptional in every one of these roles. In this article I will address the key issues, and highlight each of these roles and the route taken to become outstanding in each of them. The common theme in these roles is the ability to demonstrate consistently effective Coaching behaviours. It is only when behaviour changes that we see marked and measured corporate improvement. A serious and Focused Business Coaching and Mentoring Model is the answer to many problems that failing organisations face today.”**

## **Coaching is not Fluffy, but a serious Strategic Business Improvement Process**

It is definitely not tree hugging, hand holding or just being nice to people. It is not about staff welfare and neither is it a meagre attempt at installing a human relations culture. Coaching is too important as a tool of organisational change to occupy the old stereotype of being and having a cosy chat. It is however the most valuable and under-utilised business change tool that has been neglected for too long or considered the role of a counsellor, therapist or welfare officer.

Coaching delivers outstanding results and, if taken seriously can deliver significant and measurable ROI in a short period of time. I will focus in this article on:

- Exploring the difference between Coach, Manager and Leader and, more importantly, set out the desired outcomes and expectations of people performing at an exceptional level in each role. If you a senior player in your business, you have no option but to lead by example and be exceptional.
- Rigorous goal setting strictly tied to the tangible and stretching ambitions of the business or organisation is required to exploit the power of Coaching in Management & Leadership
- The benefits that will accrue to the Firm or Organisation of developing exceptional Coaching, Managerial and Leadership skills in the top team and direct reports
- Core attributes of the Coach, Manager and Leader
- Creating a process to instil exceptional development in these roles: Coaching, Managerial and Leadership behaviours

## **Exploring the difference between Coach, Manager and Leader: Demonstrating a High Degree of Interpersonal Skills**

Until behaviour changes nothing changes. Each of these roles requires a subset of core skills and competencies, but the ability to Coach is vital to all roles. All roles require high degrees of interpersonal competence and the ability to question, to listen, to persuade, to assert, to motivate and coach others.

It is highly unlikely that a manager purely focused on technical specialisms with a relative degree of preferred introverted style of management, will be naturally inclined and equally skilled to deal with the interpersonal issues of being an exceptional Coach. Managers who have a high degree of professional and technical expertise are probably more likely to display a high degree of analytic ability, have long attention spans, think sequentially and logically, reflect on data and are extremely factual and logical in their deliberations. They may not be natural "people-people".

People with these analytic skills will be attracted more to delivering technical expertise, and may not have a great deal of faith in deploying their people skills when they are truly required. With a long history as a licensed practitioner in psychometric profiling I suspect the analytic highly technical professional may not be the ideal candidate to take on the role of Coach and Facilitator. These highly skilled and respected individuals are critical for the success of our organisations and their analytic ability will be seen in such professions and they may occupy senior positions in the law, engineering, quality and product management, risk assurance, audit, accounting, finance IT and other professional services.

Displaying the analytic skills described above does not disbar people from being a great Coach, Manager or Leader, but, in many cases, the route to becoming an expert in a technical specialism does not usually reward the skills which the ideal Coach, Manager and Leader needs to display. These are the 'meta' skills that go beyond the demands of technical specialism. They are skills and competencies that enable the professional to operate in their specialism but also allow them to hover above their role strategically and be welcomed and valued in the role of Coach, Manager or Leader

### **So what is Coaching about? It is about igniting Possibilities and Choice**

Coaching is about using your skills to enable others to figure out the action they can take to enable others achieve their objectives. Coaching involves questioning, enquiring and listening to the Client to enable them to assess the outcomes they want to achieve in their work, their relationships and in their life. Coaching is about igniting possibilities in others, and that implies the Coach is centred on 'others' rather than 'self,' who has the capacity to ask questions to enable Clients to move to a new level of personal effectiveness in achieving their goals.

This notion of Coaching bears is far removed from the common idea of the Sports Coach who is constantly 'motivating' and shouting encouragement from the sidelines.

Neither is the Coach a social worker, counsellor or 'tree hugger' lacking in confrontational or assertive skills, who focuses solely on the Client's emotional wellbeing above all else. There is sometimes confusion between Coaching, Counselling and Psychotherapy. The effective Coach can be empathetic and dole out 'tough love' to their Clients when required.

Coaching requires a very high degree of sensory acuity and interpersonal mastery in supporting Clients in making the necessary changes that will enable them to achieve their desired outcomes. These desired outcomes are 'well formed' outcomes for which the Coach should test in their interaction with their Client.

A Coach does not tell their client what to do. They question, cajole and prepare options that allow the Client to take their best choices for them. Coaching is allowing the Client to take ownership and responsibility to shape their future.

Business Coaching enables Clients to appraise the actions they can take to improve their performance, and Managers at all levels can learn to be an effective Business Coach to support their people in driving personal and business Change.

Management Teams often use Coaching interventions to prepare themselves for managing change through their business. It is a powerful process that is designed to support the changes that are currently or about to challenge their business, and can significantly improve the performance of the Organisation and delivers a very high ROI if tailored for the organisation and deployed correctly.

'Manager or Leader as Coach' can have a tremendous impact on the performance of an Organisation and be geared for instance towards:

- Managing change in any context of technological nature, growth, productivity improvement, downsizing, installing a CRM or Quality culture etc
- Developing a Business Development culture and business growth and acquisition
- Radically improves team performance when incorporated into a Performance Management process
- Motivating a tired and weary Enterprise to performance manage to industry best practice – thereby delivering enhanced key performance measures for investors and stakeholders in difficult times
- Creating a culture of retention of existing Clients and new Client acquisition – Clients take years to mature into business, but minutes to lose
- Enables the speedy integration of a business merger or acquisition – ensuring that top team members, operational teams and their direct reports hit the road running

Through a carefully crafted and tailored process, it is relatively easy to equip Managers and Leaders with Coaching skills to enable their teams to significantly improve their performance, while at the same time growing professionally.

Leadership Teams often opt for this change strategy over conventional management training which often may deliver learning but Coaching creates the enhanced performance that is really required for business growth and continuity. The old sway of attending traditional management training is outdated and discredited in delivering the required solutions that Firms and Enterprises are challenged by today.

Short inputs on discrete skill sets or competencies can have a short term impact that can be easily sustained over time. With minimal attendance at learning events, managers can grasp the essentials of performance Coaching and put their talents to work straightaway and incorporate the 'Manager or Leader as Coach' as a new style for delivering continuous improvement.

### **What is Managing about? It is about Achieving Results through Others**

Managing requires bringing people and technology together to ensure that processes are followed to meet the overall objectives of the Organisation. Traditionally, Managers become Managers solely because they were probably the best technical person around. Traditional thinking stated, "They demonstrate a high degree of technical expertise in their specialism, so who better to run the department? Make no mistake; this is still common practice in many traditional and public sector Organisations. Many Managers are still promoted for the wrong reasons – because of their technical proficiency, rather than their team skills and

ability to manage. However capable they may be 'technically', their ability to manage is another 'meta skill' that cannot be acquired surprisingly just by length of service, age or experience.

The role of Manager is regarded fundamentally as being transactional in terms of managing resources and people in order to achieve a super ordinate objective. This requires the ability to talk and work with people, to persuade and influence others not just in the team but also with others from different specialisms that have an impact or input into the service that the manager provides.

Increasingly, the traditional bureaucratic model of Organisation is being replaced by a form of Matrix Organisation where equal responsibility is placed on managing the key actors, not just in one's department, but managing and influencing events and issues with others in the wider supply chain that supports the provision of a good or service to a customer.

Many Organisations are replacing the traditional structure with a customer or Client centric process map which spans the entire Organisation, from initial interaction from the Customer's point of entry to actual physical delivery to the Client or Customer. So, the first point of contact may be an enquiry form that is submitted via the company website, but delivery of the service could be the physical transfer of goods and services by a business unit which is geographically very distant from the initial 'point of entry' and miles away from the location where the 'point of sale' is completed.

Clearly, some level of hierarchy is still evident but the focus for managing is very much across boundaries and specialisms, and the ability of the manager to manage is their ability to deal with different cultures and resolve seemingly ambiguous requests from a non specific technical perspective. This Manager's skills will reside in managing or facilitating the completion of the Client's needs, wants and requests. No amount of technical expertise will make the average Manager more effective in their role of Managing.

An emphasis on conflict resolution to avoid 'turf wars', a strong customer centric focus, and an ability to resolve operational problems from multiple perspectives is what is really valued in many of today's Organisations – despite them still being managed on traditional lines.

Having experience in Coaching self first and then staff, is fundamental to success in such instances, and leading and learning Organisations are seriously changing the role of departmental managers and supervisors reporting through a strict hierarchy, and are instead de-layering and developing cross functional and virtual team leaders who problem solve and facilitate across boundaries and silos.

### **What is Leadership about? It is about Strategic role, Challenging, Inspiring and Motivating others to achieve a greater Vision**

Leadership is a strategic role that requires influencing others and directing resources to specific projects which lead to sustained business development and profitability for the business. Leadership is an extroverted role that requires influence and persuasion, not just with staff, but potential and existing investors, core stakeholders, regulatory bodies, clients, customers and suppliers.

Not everyone is suited to become leader – it requires people to assess their own leadership potential and match that with their ambition to take on the role. Leaders do tend to be

independent of thought, decisive and comfortable moving beyond the familiar and their core expertise or specialism.

Leadership is really about inspiring others to achieve results that are for the greatest good for the Enterprise or Firm. Right from the start of any Leadership project, one has to understand that there is no ideal leadership style, nor is there one 'best way to lead'. The style of leadership is contingent upon the situation, the history and culture of the Firm, the challenges facing the Enterprise and host of other factors. Some attributes that are critical in the Leadership role are the ability to cope with ambiguity, to be flexible and spontaneous in the role and decisive in problem solving.

One can be clear that Leadership is a challenging process that should inspire others. Not everyone may be persuaded straight away to a course of action, so the leader needs to be sufficiently skilled to explore different influencing strategies and be able to cope with dissenters. Leaders also need to spot and deal constructively with resistance to new ideas, and to change and be resilient enough to cope with holding unpopular views whilst at the same time being resourceful in building relationships, and on occasion, delivering bad news.

Leaders need to be visible – not just for the good things, but also for the inevitable situations which require tact: dealing with reaching and implementing difficult or bad news. This means they 'walk the talk' and need to ensure that they lead by example and not exhortation.

In summary, Leadership is difficult and requires significant development. Although some people may possess some Leadership capabilities, no one is born a leader. Leadership is something that can be learned. Some people respond well to development and can far exceed their original expectations, whereas others, however hard they try, may not enjoy the core traits that will enable them to become a true leader.

We all have potential, but Leadership development is fundamentally down to having what it takes to manage your own change, and stretching oneself to become a true visionary, a visible and vibrant energised leader who is prepared to go into 'undiscovered country' and make tough decisions, as well as motivate others.

It must be remembered that Leadership is not a transactional role but is transformational.

### **Goal setting to exploit the power of Coaching in Management & Leadership**

Development in any of these arenas is suitable for most Firms and Enterprises wanting to achieve more in a challenging business climate. As Firms set strategies and plans to ride the waves of change, they will be severely disadvantaged if their top teams and direct reports are not equipped to deliver beyond their technical specialism. It is pointless having a team of Lawyers, Accountants, Auditors, Risk and Quality Managers up-skilled in technical jargon, but avoid developing the Coaching, Change and Leadership skills of their most highly paid staff.

It really does pay to invest in your top people and anyone who manages others. Think about the salary bill as a percentage of your total costs. Depending on the Organisation, the salary bill can cost a large percentage of the balance sheet, especially if the Enterprise is knowledge based and labour intensive.

It is sensible to consider the price of failing to invest in your human capital when the known ROI can significantly shift the Firm's performance. Enterprises tend to ignore the fact that they are already investing in the salaries and associated costs of employment and fail to consider the huge returns that Coaching can deliver. The Enterprise is already paying for the use of labour – it is a simple equation to consider that marginal investment in supporting and leveraging the expertise of key players can have a significant shift in deliverables that far outstrip the initial investment.

Organisations already have incurred the employment costs of salaries – so why not invest in your most valuable asset, your people, to radically improve performance. For a small investment in several team players or even a top team of eight people and direct reports can have huge impact on service delivery to Clients.

**The benefits to the Firm of developing exceptional Coaching, Managerial and Leadership skills in the top roles including direct reports**

<b>Organisational</b>	<b>Personal &amp; Team</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on Business Goals in the short and the long term</li> <li>• Tap into, exploit and maximise the potential of staff at all levels</li> <li>• Set in measured process of Coaching and Leadership geared towards service delivery and process improvement</li> <li>• Motivate and install a freedom to succeed team culture operating across the business</li> <li>• Engage with Staff, ignite their motivations and their career</li> <li>• Becoming a learning organisation and be renowned for industry 'best practice'</li> <li>• Commit to serious career and performance management</li> <li>• Create a visible and positive return on investment in L&amp;D activities</li> <li>• Become a beacon of light to your Clients for installing cultural 'best practice'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on personal and team goals geared towards the business's core competency</li> <li>• Individuals and Teams who are more focused and engaged set challenging personal goals related to organisational success</li> <li>• Intrinsic Motivation is increased and feeling valued by the organisation is returned by staff loyalty</li> <li>• Career Development &amp; Growth is enhanced and work is more than just a job</li> <li>• Responsibility for own Learning increases</li> <li>• Personal Growth is enhanced igniting higher need achievement</li> <li>• Potential is at or near to maximum</li> <li>• Personal Engagement increases</li> <li>• Staff become accomplished in managing their personal change</li> <li>• Retain best quality staff, discourage poor performance</li> </ul>

**Core attributes of Coach, Manager and Leader**

It is pretty clear that if one can imbue the technical expertise of the top team and their direct reports with commercial wisdom and Influencing, Coaching and Business Development skills, any Firm, Organisation or Enterprise will flourish. It is literally impossible not to achieve outstanding success by using a rigorous Coaching model.

In reality, much of what holds back Firms and Organisations is the lack of abilities of team members at senior level, as well the resistance to change inherent in many cultures who still operate traditionally with the old business model. Coaching however, releases the energies of core people in the structure, and equipping them with interpersonal competence and

confidence is instrumental in propelling the Firm or Organisation to significant levels of achievement.

Equipping the Management Team with additional Coaching and Leadership skills brings a new life to the business, and working with the top two tiers in the business has significant impact. Consider a Firm of 100 people with 20 people occupying top team and senior positions. The act of working 1:1 on in small groups with these people over a fairly short period of time can impact the whole Organisation and the results they achieve very quickly. It is the 'pebble in the pond' ripple effect that radiates out from the initial intervention. In most cases, a Firm can see substantial improvement over a three month period. There is no requirement to wonder whether the change initiative has cascaded down to every level, because the real change makers are not Consultants and Trainers but the Top Team and their own direct reports. If you 'walk the talk' you reap the rewards.

In larger Organisations, the changes will still be seen in a three month period but the impact and penetration of the benefits and changes will be so much deeper. In larger Organisations there may be a longer term requirement not just with people but also to work on systems and processes, because of scale and complexity, but the essential change will be underway and the 'will' and the 'mindset' will be established quickly.

This contrasts with the old traditional approach of cascading training Workshops down through the structure and then waiting for the next stage to bite. Change in this case is virtually instantaneous. If things are working well – ideas and innovations can then be installed in other similar areas in the business.

And remember, until behaviour changes, nothing changes, and measured change and improvement is the goal of any effective Coaching & Leadership intervention. Likewise, if an approach is not working, then changes can be made to take corrective action and fix what is wrong or not working. Measured feedback is the key. If pursuing an approach and 'actions and behaviours' are not taking us nearer our goal – then reappraise and reconsider to ensure that actions and behaviours do take us much nearer, rather than further away, from our goal.

The use of Coaching Diaries and Progress Reports enable Teams and Individuals to learn and implement ideas so that progress is visible and the behaviours that led to that progress are transparent. You can soon install a culture of continuous improvement and 'best practice' that your Clients, Customers and Competitors will notice.

### **Creating & Implementing a process to instil exceptional development in these roles: Coaching, Managerial and Leadership behaviours**

We start the journey with a 'Discovery Review', which is a detailed assessment of the Firm's ambitions and strategic plan as perceived by the Top Team and their direct reports. Data is collected through 1:1 interviews and the use of Focus Groups and tailored questionnaires. An assessment of 'current' and 'desired' states is then undertaken and a Coaching process is tailored and designed specifically to match the gap between 'here and now' and the desired 'future' state. We have developed a series of Questionnaires or 'Health checks' that enable a Firm or Enterprise to diagnose precisely the issues that need to be addressed.

A report is then generated which becomes the basis for action planning with the Top Leadership Team to discuss possibilities, options and strategies for implementation. A major

feature of this process is the setting of key performance measures, and action planning for teams and key individuals which will be the focus of Coaching and Leadership initiatives.

The implementation plan is critical to this process. Working in partnership with the Leadership team we jointly design a Coaching and Leadership process which will enable the Firm or Enterprise to achieve its ambitions. We agree milestones and measures by which to assess progress. Measures are put in places which reflect the core elements of the Coaching and Leadership progress.

The advantage of this is that what gets measured gets done. Further, the process can be assessed and measured straight way and when progress is made this can be published to demonstrate measured progress and success. This process in itself is a feedback process that is self-motivating. People can see progress and positive success stories can be relayed and accepted as routes to 'best practice.' Further, many Firms and Enterprise are committing to this process because at any time one can assess progress and make any necessary changes. This is a genuine route to continuous improvement.

**Author**

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