

CHAPTER 20

Coaching Skills for the New Manager

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ABSTRACT

The manner in which managers operate has changed considerably over the past decade, under the combined influence of globalisation, new technology, a changing workforce and greater organisational investment in developing the capability and engagement of employees. Traditional management relied principally on authority, control and supervision. Managers today are moving instead towards approaches founded on collaboration, empowerment and continuous learning, and the capacity to coach has become a central competence in consequence — nowhere more so than among the newly promoted. A manager appointed for the first time must move from being an individual contributor to being responsible for the development of others, building trust, aligning individual objectives with those of the organisation and establishing a culture in which high performance is sustainable. This article examines coaching as a competence for new managers. It defines coaching in the managerial context and distinguishes it from mentoring, counselling and training; it identifies the constituent skills of active listening, powerful questioning, constructive feedback, collaborative goal-setting and emotional intelligence; and it considers the documented effects of managerial coaching on employee performance and engagement. It further examines the difficulties new managers encounter in adopting a coaching approach — want of confidence, pressure of time and reluctance to relinquish control — and the means by which coaching skill may be developed. The article concludes that coaching has ceased to be an optional refinement of managerial practice and has become a condition of effectiveness.

Keywords: Coaching; New managers; Feedback; Employee engagement; Leadership development.

1.0 Introduction

The move into a managerial position is frequently described as among the most difficult transitions in a career.

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Those selected for management are usually promoted for their technical skill, their knowledge of the work or their record as individual performers, and rarely for any demonstrated ability to manage others (Hill, 2003). Technical competence remains important, but a manager's success is measured far more by the quality of their relationships, their communication and their capacity to lead. Because many new managers continue to concentrate on completing work themselves rather than on developing and directing a team, they commonly experience stress, uncertainty about their role and disappointing results.

Managers formerly occupied a central position in planning, organising, directing and controlling the work of an organisation. Authority descended through the hierarchy, and employees were expected to perform according to instruction with little participation in decisions. Organisations now operate in conditions of greater complexity and more rapid change, and managerial success accordingly depends on the capacity of employees to create, to adapt and to commit themselves to the work.

Employees today expect their managers to provide direct guidance, regular support and opportunities for advancement. They wish to work for someone who will take the time to listen, to understand their objectives and to help remove the obstacles they encounter. Coaching is the practice through which managers are able to offer support of this kind, resting as it does on open communication, encouragement of self-directed learning and the transfer of ownership for results to the employee.

This article offers an extended and reflective examination of coaching skills for new managers. It considers what coaching means in a managerial setting, why it has become important to managerial effectiveness, which competencies it comprises, and what difficulties attend its practical application.

2.0 Concept Explanation: Coaching in the Context of Management

Coaching, understood managerially, is a flexible but structured developmental practice through which managers help employees improve their performance and develop personally and professionally. Traditional management proceeds by direction: the manager specifies how work is to be done. Coaching proceeds collaboratively, using enquiry to prompt self-discovery and development. The manager's function is to help employees reflect on their experience, identify the difficulties they face and arrive at solutions, rather than to supply the answer (Whitmore, 2017).

The practice rests on the premise that individuals are capable of learning, developing and resolving their own problems when given appropriate support. Coaching looks forward rather than dwelling on past error, and it places responsibility for action and outcome with the employee. Regular conversation between manager and employee clarifies

what each expects of the other, aligns individual objectives with those of the organisation and builds confidence.

2.1 Coaching distinguished from mentoring, counselling and training

Coaching is often confused with other forms of developmental support, and the distinctions are worth stating. A mentor is a more experienced colleague who shares knowledge acquired over a career and who may open access to wider professional networks; the relationship is generally longer in duration and broader in scope than a coaching one (Clutterbuck, 2014). Counselling addresses emotional or personal difficulties that are impairing a person's capacity to work, and lies outside a manager's competence. Training transmits defined knowledge or skill according to a set curriculum. Coaching differs from all three in being non-directive, focused on performance in the current role and driven by the employee's own reasoning rather than by the expertise of the person providing it.

3.0 The Importance of Coaching Skills for New Managers

3.1 Supporting the transition from individual contributor to manager

The transition from individual contributor to manager is a substantial obstacle, requiring that a person cease to perform the work directly and attend instead to those who do. Coaching assists this transition by establishing a pattern of collaboration in place of control. As employees are developed to solve problems and to contribute to decisions, new managers find that the degree of supervision they must exercise declines correspondingly (Watkins, 2012).

3.2 Asking powerful and open-ended questions

The capacity to ask open-ended questions is among the principal coaching skills, since it helps employees arrive at their own conclusions rather than depending on others for them. Such questions invite an employee to think critically, to reflect and to explore a situation more fully than a closed question would permit. Open-ended questions characteristically begin by asking what an employee thinks, how they would approach a matter or in what manner a difficulty might be addressed. They enable an employee to analyse a situation, identify the problems within it, generate possible responses and evaluate them. Rather than instructing an employee how to resolve a difficulty, for instance, a manager might ask what options the employee considers to be available.

3.3 Providing feedback as a core coaching practice

Feedback is central to coaching, but what matters most is the manner in which it is given. Developmental feedback aims to improve performance while sustaining confidence

and motivation, and it is therefore objective, specific and grounded in observable behaviour rather than in inferences about personality.

New managers frequently find this difficult, erring in one of two directions: withholding challenging feedback altogether for fear of damaging a relationship, or delivering it so bluntly that the employee becomes defensive. Both failures are common, and both are correctable with practice.

3.4 Setting goals and aligning performance with organisational priorities

Goal-setting gives a new manager the means of directing and motivating employees while establishing clearly what each is expected to achieve. Through coaching, managers help employees construct objectives that are clear, attainable, appropriately prioritised and consistent with the wider aims of the organisation.

Objectives should be established collaboratively rather than assigned unilaterally, since participation produces markedly greater commitment and a stronger sense of accountability on both sides. Managers should also help employees determine the measures by which progress will be assessed and the timescales within which the necessary actions are to be completed.

3.5 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is essential to coaching, consisting as it does in the capacity to recognise and manage one's own emotional states and to read those of others (Goleman, 1998). Self-awareness allows a manager to understand how their conduct and disposition affect an employee. Self-regulation allows them to remain composed under pressure. Empathy allows them to apprehend an employee's point of view and to respond to it supportively rather than dismissively.

4.0 Application of Coaching Skills in Organisations

4.1 The effect of coaching on employee performance

Research has established that employee performance improves where managers coach effectively (Ellinger et al., 2003). Employees acquire a clearer understanding of what is expected of them, learn new methods and approach their work with greater energy. Coaching conversations also provide an occasion on which shortfalls in performance may be identified and discussed before they become entrenched.

For new managers, coaching offers a means of managing performance without recourse to authoritarian methods, and in doing so it establishes a performance culture founded on learning and continuous improvement rather than on compliance.

4.2 The effect of coaching on employee engagement

The quality of the relationship between a manager and an employee bears directly on that employee's engagement. Coaching strengthens the relationship by improving communication, establishing mutual respect and directing both parties towards a common objective. Employees who believe themselves supported by their manager are correspondingly more committed, more productive and more likely to remain.

New managers who coach their employees demonstrate a genuine interest in their potential, and morale and satisfaction generally rise as a result (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019).

4.3 Challenges new managers face in coaching

Coaching is an effective mode of leadership, but new managers commonly encounter difficulty in adopting it. Three obstacles recur:

- Want of confidence in conducting a coaching conversation, particularly where the manager is uncertain of their own standing.
- Pressure of time and the weight of an existing workload.
- Reluctance to relinquish control, especially over work the manager previously performed personally and performed well.

Organisations can assist new managers in overcoming these difficulties by providing training, coaching and mentoring of their own, and by establishing cultures in which managers are recognised for developing others rather than solely for delivering results.

4.4 Developing coaching skills

Coaching ability is not innate; it is acquired through instruction and practice. New managers may develop it by:

- Participating in structured development programmes.
- Seeking feedback from colleagues and mentors on their own coaching conversations.
- Undertaking regular self-reflection and continued study.
- Observing how senior colleagues who coach well actually conduct themselves.

Practised consistently over time, these behaviours allow coaching to become an integral part of a manager's ordinary working method rather than a technique reserved for formal occasions.

5.0 Conclusion

For new managers, coaching has moved from being an optional refinement to being a requirement of effective leadership in contemporary organisations. As a manager settles

into a leadership position, their capacity to coach shapes both their own success and that of the team they lead, since coaching is what enables employees to perform at their highest level and to develop a genuine attachment to their work.

By cultivating self-awareness and extending their ability to listen actively, to ask searching questions, to give practical feedback and to hold employees accountable for objectives they have helped to set, new managers offer substantial support to those they lead. The obstacles associated with becoming an effective coach are real but surmountable, and they yield to a sustained commitment to learning and development.

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