

Coaching Skills for Managers Programme

Participants handouts

What are Coaching and Mentoring?

The words coaching and mentoring are often used interchangeably. They are both developmental dialogues and use the same skills of listening, questioning, giving feedback etc. The differences between the two forms of learning intervention tend to be defined by relationship and organisation. Coaching is typically an assignment focused on behaviour and performance in a current role, with a shorter-term focus. Mentoring is a relationship with a greater focus on longer-term development, career self-management and the acquisition of wisdom.

Coaching and mentoring have a lot of overlaps. Here are some of the similarities and differences:

Similarities

- Focus on the quality of the learner's thinking
- Coach/mentor uses their experience to develop powerful questions
- Advice giving is permitted, but not generally as a first solution.
- Much of the learning occurs in the reflections of the learner between or after sessions. This tends to be the product of their reflection on their reflection, or developing a more critically reflexive approach as a result of the coaching/mentoring.
- Coach and mentor both have a duty of care towards the learner.

Differences

Coaching	Mentoring
Concerned with task	Concerned with implications beyond the task
Focuses on behaviours and performance	Focuses on capability and potential
External/internal coach or coaching by the line manager	Works best as an off-line relationship within an organisation or by an external mentor
Agenda set by or with the coach	Agenda set by the learner
Emphasises feedback <i>to</i> and <i>by</i> the learner	Emphasises feedback and reflection <i>by</i> the learner
Typically addresses a short-term need	Typically, a longer-term relationship
Feedback and discussion primarily explicit	Feedback and discussion primarily about implicit, intuitive issues and behaviours

Personal reflection

This is for your own use and does not have to be submitted. However, if you find this reflection interesting you may wish to post something on the Sharing Space to discuss with your colleagues on the programme.

1. When have you been coached and mentoring in your working or personal life?

2. Are you conscious of when you coach? And when you mentor?
3. Are you clear about the differences in these types of relationships?
4. How important is it in reality?

If you would like more clarification about the differences between coaching and mentoring then please discuss this with your facilitator.

Contracting in Coaching as a Line Manager

Coaching sessions require forethought and planning on your part. You may want to identify specific performance issues to address, skill gaps to fill or a new role you are preparing your staff member for. In these times of turbulence, how you work through some of the issues and difficulties facing the individuals in your team are probably going to be very high on the list. Dealing with change, transition and the agility to keep things moving forward! Before you start coaching someone in your team, do have a 'contracting' conversation to ensure you both agree how you will work together in a coaching way.

The minimum requirement is that you should discuss the issues of relationship purpose and relationship management sufficiently to acquire a shared understanding of them. Do think in advance how much your aims are likely to tie in with theirs? Is this going to be a relationship where a coaching approach will work? Or do you perhaps have to do some pre-work to build trust and rapport further before coaching can commence (see article on building rapport and trust in the optional activity of this module).

Do remember a lot of line manager coaching takes place at the 'water cooler' in short conversations. In these days of virtual working this could now be a quick virtual check in or an email that requires a coaching response. When you are working virtually with your team members, having an understanding between you on how you will manage them in a 'coaching way' is imperative.

We recommend you work through this checklist when you commence coaching someone in your team. You can lead the conversation through these questions, choosing those which are most appropriate, or share the checklist with your team member if that is easier.

The 'contract' will evolve with the relationship. As trust and frequency of coaching develops, the boundaries tend to 'soften' or disappear completely.

Checklist for a Contracting Conversation

Topics to discuss when agreeing how to work together in a coaching relationship	Our agreement
1. What are our responsibilities towards each other? What are the limits?	
2. What are both our expectations of working together in a coaching relationship?	
3. Where and how often shall we talk more formally? For how long?	
4. How formal or informal do we want our conversations/meetings to be?	
5. What limits (if any) are there on confidentiality?	
6. What are we prepared to tell others about our discussions?	
7. How happy is the member of staff for the manager to challenge and confront them?	
8. How does the member of staff feel about receiving direct feedback from the manager?	
9. Are we agreed that openness and trust are essential? How will we ensure they happen?	
10. How will we measure progress?	
11. When and how shall we review our coaching relationship?	
12. Any other points we would like to discuss and agree together?	

Asking the Right Questions

How you ask questions is very important in establishing a basis for good coaching.

Always look at the type of question that best meets your aims. You may want to open up a specific discussion, check comprehension (yours or the staff member) clarify factual information or support the creation of reflective space to help them develop a solution to a particular problem.

To ensure that you don't sound like an interrogator, you can preface your questions with a 'soft' lead in explanation, such as:

- I'm interested to know...
- Help me to understand...
- In your experience can you explain...

A useful model for asking questions, which also supports deep listening is the TED Model:

- 'Tell me...'
- 'Explain to me...'
- 'Describe to me...'

Types of Questions

Open

- Used to raise awareness, focus and explore. They are questions which encourage the member of your team to expand their explanation. Carries the risk that it can make people defensive or imply that there is a preferred response.
- Open questions begin with: 'how?', 'why?', 'what?', 'where?', 'when?', 'who?'
- Can be used to increase ownership, for example:
'How do you propose to meet the objective?'
- They carry the risk that they can be vague or over-generalised, for example:
'What do you think the future holds for you?'

Closed

- Used for checking information and confirming agreement, these are questions which result in one word, yes/no answers:
'Have you updated your action plan?'

Comparative

- Questions which compare two situations:
'What are you doing differently now compared with xx weeks/months ago?'
'How has that experience affected what you do now?'

Probing

- Used to check for more detail or further information:

'You said you'd been experiencing difficulties with the process. What exactly what went wrong?'

Reflecting

- Used for exploring attitudes and opinions in detail. It is usually phrased as a statement rather than a question and generally reverses a statement of response:

'From what you've said it seems to me you're not happy...'

Challenging (use with care)

- Questions which may 'shock' individuals out of their assumptions and prompt them to self-assess their performance:

'To what extent do you think your lack of planning contributed to the problems we ran into?'

Assertive

- Used to express an opinion and seek the individual's views:

'I think you could benefit from some exposure to Field work. How would you feel about spending some time on Sam's team?'

Empathetic

- Used to reveal feelings:

'How do you feel about...?'

Consequences

- Used to make your member of staff think about the likely results of their planned actions:

'What impact will this decision have on your other work?'

Permission

- Asking for permission to pursue a particular course of enquiry or action:

'Would you mind if...?'

'Would you like to...?'

Hypothetical

- Questions which enable the individual to come up with and consider options before committing:

'How would you feel about...?'

- They are also used to encourage individuals to consider all contingencies:

'What would you do if...?'

Leading (use with care)

- Used to reinforce shared assumptions:

'How can you best gain experience and learn more about child protection?'

- Carries the danger that the member of staff meekly echoes what the implied response to the question should be:

'Do you think it would be better to do this tomorrow rather than rushing through it now?'

Multiple (don't use if possible)

- The listener is confused and generally only answers one – often the last one. They can indicate insufficient preparation/thought on the part of the coach:

“What is your plan? Who will you tell about it? When will you action it?”

Reflection

This is for your own use and does not have to be submitted. However, if you find this reflection interesting you may wish to post something on the Sharing Space to discuss with your colleagues on the programme.

- What type of questions do you prefer to use?
- Are there any categories here you would like to try going forward?
- Are there any types of questions you intend to use less?

Building Rapport and Trust in a Coaching Relationship

Rapport or the state of being relaxed and responsive to the other person in a coaching relationship, means being genuinely connected to the other person. If you don't have rapport you won't be able to gain trust, which is imperative in coaching. You need to build trust in order for the individual being coached to be comfortable enough to allow themselves to feel vulnerable, to own up to what they don't know, to feel able to express confusion or concerns. Your member of staff won't share with you if there are possible risks of failure attached to what they are doing and they feel that you don't trust them and they don't trust you.

Rapport building is all about working easily together. You do need to have sufficient willingness, respect and growing trust to want to work together. Below are some easy steps to help you work towards this process.

Steps to rapport building:

The five characteristics of rapport are: focus, empathy, congruence, empowerment and trust:

Focus - Have two or three clear developmental goals or areas to work on together. This will give your relationship a clear purpose and structure. You will find it easier to like and respect another individual if you are working on something of importance to both of you. This creates focus.

Empathy - You will need to share or acknowledge at least, the validity of each other's values. This supports the development of empathy between you. Look at the situation through the eyes of the person you are coaching to understand their perspective of what is happening. Begin more formal coaching sessions by re-establishing rapport. Use normal social trivialities to help you both relax, and then go into the issues to be explored.

Rapport does not mean always agreeing with the other person. However, your primary effort needs to go into understanding them and seeing the world through their eyes. They will truly feel listened to then.

Congruence – Can you really switch your judgement off? Are you willing to see the world through the eyes of your member of staff and use your empathy? When you are being congruent, people are more inclined to believe you and trust you. It demonstrates you are what you say you are and you are not 'hiding' things from your team.

Empowerment – Is your coaching help aimed at helping the member of staff to be independent as soon as possible?

Trust - Building trust is the key part of establishing your rapport in the coaching relationship. You must work at it and it will take time.

The seven types of trust in coaching are:



1. Trust that you care about each other
2. Trust in each other's values (that you both believe the same things about what is important in relationships)
3. Trust in the confidentiality of the relationship
4. Trust in each other's willingness to learn from the other
5. Trust that each will do what they say they will do
6. Trust that each will talk about concerns they have about the relationship
7. Trust that each will challenge appropriately when it is needed – knowing the value of a 'critical' friend. Challenge to you is also important to help your own growth and development.

Reflection

This is for your own use and does not have to be submitted. However, if you find this reflection interesting you may wish to post something on the Sharing Space to discuss with your colleagues on the programme.

- How 'comfortable' do you feel coaching your team members?
- Are there certain individuals you need to work with to build your rapport and trust further so you can have an effective coaching relationship?

Giving Feedback in Coaching

Feedback is an enabling mechanism in all relationships. The skills of both giving and receiving feedback are fundamental to effective relationships.

Delivered skilfully, it conveys the idea that you want the person to improve and that you value the contribution that he or she can make. However, feedback given clumsily can seem like blame or anger, it can be destructive criticism. It has the effect of eroding self-esteem and making the desired performance improvement less likely.

Receiving feedback is also a skill, which can be learnt and improved upon, and you should enjoy receiving positive feedback! You should equally welcome constructive feedback because it can lead to valuable learning and development.

Constructive feedback at key stages in individuals' careers can ensure that their potential is realised. Feedback about an individual's current performance is equally as important, in order for them to concentrate on developing effectively in their current role

Giving constructive feedback is just as important from the individual's perspective as they need to let their coach know how they are finding their relationship and process working. They need to state what is helpful to them and what is not, in a very open manner.

There are a number of ways in which feedback can be given, some more helpful than others:

- **Positive feedback** praises strengths and achievements. It is possibly the easiest form of feedback to give, but nonetheless extremely important. It is very motivating to receive positive feedback.
- **Negative feedback** involves commenting on problems and areas of improvement — more difficult to give, but important and useful if given skilfully.
- **Constructive feedback** is a combination of positive and negative feedback, which focuses on suggestions for dealing with problems. This is probably the most productive way of giving feedback.
- **Destructive feedback** consists of criticism with little or no emphasis on positive suggestions. It is to be avoided, as it dampens enthusiasm and reduces commitment.
- Be **honest** but stick to what is relevant.
- Don't **judge** the individual.
- Describe the **behaviour** and its effect(s).

If you wish to encourage people to maintain or develop their performance your feedback should be:

- **Specific:** pointing out several examples of the individual's good performance as well as giving detailed examples of the particular occasions or events, which left scope for improvement.
- **Immediate:** praising or constructively criticising an individual now, not at a future date.
- **Based on issues:** criticism should be directed at aspects of performance, not at the individual as a person.

Here is a useful model for giving feedback in a coaching way.

[The Three Stage Model for Giving or Receiving Feedback](#)

1. What's gone well?

If you start with something positive you will gain the person's interest.

They are less likely to be defensive.

Always acknowledge success.

2. What could be improved?

Look forward not back — 'should haves' induce feelings of guilt and sap energy.

What is there to learn from this situation, to avoid recurrence or future problems?

Always ask open questions to explore what went wrong.

3. What specifically could we do differently in the future?

Produce an action plan.

Encourage the individual to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

Reflection

This is for your own use and does not have to be submitted. However, if you find this reflection interesting you may wish to post something on the Sharing Space to discuss with your colleagues on the programme.

- How comfortable are you giving feedback in a coaching conversation to members of your team?
- What key action can you take to improve your ability to give feedback going forward?

Tackling Barriers to Coaching

Sometimes you will encounter resistance to coaching from employees. There may be a number of reasons for this.

It is useful for you to be aware of possible barriers so that you can understand the problem and be in a better position to try to tackle it.

Motivation

You'll need to be prepared to meet resistance due to lack of motivation. This resistance may become manifested in the following ways:

- Staff members who are poorly motivated in their work may generally exhibit a lack of motivation to improve through coaching
- Staff members who are not interested in developing their career in the organisation will likely be unmotivated to improve

Equality

People may have experienced discrimination which barred their access to learning opportunities and development in the past.

Unequal access to learning could result from discrimination based on:

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- English not being the first language

This experience could affect an individual's response to coaching. Be prepared to give extra reassurance.

Age and Seniority

This group of people may exhibit resistance to coaching because:

- They feel coaching is like training and is for junior staff members
- They feel that any need for coaching reflects badly on their current performance
- They are embarrassed when the coach is a person younger than themselves.

Be prepared for these issues arising and let the individual know that you recognise their existing expertise and achievements.

Reflection

This is for your own use and does not have to be submitted. However, if you find this reflection interesting you may wish to post something on the Sharing Space to discuss with your colleagues on the programme.

- Do you recognise any of these barriers to coaching in your own team? If so, how will you overcome them?
- You can raise any of these issues in the next Action Learning Set and discuss them with your colleagues.

How can I coach my team?

What kind of coaching can a line manager do? What not?

The task of a line manager coach is to help the person being coached find their own motivation, define shared goals, and discover from within their own experience and abilities and support from you as their line manager, how improved performance is possible for them. You can then support them to develop this.

Annual developmental discussions rarely work and may actually be a de-motivator. The problem with any kind of ritual is that the process tends to be more important than the content. Both manager and direct report may see this conversation as something they are obliged to do, according to HR's timetable. Better to align developmental conversations with what is happening for your member of staff, so that they occur just in time and so that they can focus, not on past half-forgotten events, but on current, live issues.

Appraisals need to be genuinely two-way. Seek regular feedback from direct reports about how you helped or hindered their performance - perhaps twice as often as you give feedback to them.

Be attentive to the employee's transition points – demonstrate interest in their evolving perceptions about their role and their career progress and seek to use their frustrations productively, by finding new outlets for their energy and their newly acquired skills.

Talk with talented employees about your own role. This helps them to understand the constraints you have to operate under, while giving them an insight into the thinking patterns of the next layer of management.

Look at your own role with a view to what you could delegate and would be a developmental opportunity for direct reports.

Think about what you can do to make it easier for them to be honest with you. If appropriate, contract with your team, or with individuals, about just how open you and they can be.

The inherent role conflict in coaching as a line manager

Trust — The manager is often seen as having his or her own agenda, in parallel with, or worse, overlaying that of the learner. Moreover, the fact that a manager gives one employee more coaching than another can be interpreted as a lack of trust in that individual.

Confidentiality — Employees do not always believe that the discussion with their line manager will be kept confidential. (Indeed, some organisations are explicit that the content may be shared with HR and/or the manager's own boss).

Openness — For the line manager, there may be significant conflict of loyalties

Short-term imperative — The manager's need to demonstrate short-term gains to his bosses can easily overshadow the learner's longer-term objectives.

Linear processing — Says creativity guru Edward de Bono: "The way managers think can be a hindrance to the creative process. Managers are taught analysis, to evaluate and use judgement."

As a result, the line manager coach may become enmeshed in the numbers and in the “hard” part of performance change, to the extent that he or she pays inadequate attention to the human factors.

Groupthink — People, who work together, tend to adopt the same filters on the world around them and have the same blind spots. Paradoxically, the better the relationship between line manager and member of staff, the more likely this is to be the case.

Power pollution — Managers may experience a conflict of role between being a trusted friend in the coaching relationship, and the guardian of team discipline outside of it.

“Parent-child gravitational pull” — Having Adult-to-Adult discussions around critical feedback can be difficult, when both parties are emotionally bound up in the work task in question. “Putting on my managerial hat” tends to result in a more authoritarian tone by the coach/manager.

In groups v out groups — If one sub-group perceives that another receives more coaching (or less, if coaching is seen as remedial) than another, it may breed resentment.

“Set-up to fail” syndrome — The other side of the coin is that individuals, who are singled out for coaching as poor performers, may avoid the manager in order to protect their own ego. As a result, their chances of improving performance are yet further reduced.

Reflection Checklist - How can I coach my team?

Reflect on these questions as you plan to coach your team:

1. What gets in the way of you coaching?
2. Consider your own role: what could you delegate as developmental opportunities for direct reports.
3. Think about what you can do to make it easier for your team to be honest and open with you?
4. Do people feel able to be open and honest with themselves and with others about work, developmental and career issues?
5. Do people feel that you are supportive of them?
6. What is the depth of your conversations with them?
7. Do people feel they are being listened to about their work, ideas, developmental needs and career aspirations?
8. Are they primarily developmental or remedial conversations that you have with your team?

9. Are they conversations focused on strengths or weaknesses?
10. Do you discuss development and career aspirations?
11. Do you understand the skill and motivation levels of your team members? (see Module Two – Optional activity for reminder)
12. Do you understand the barriers to coaching within in your team? (see Module Three – Optional activity for reminder)