

Fact-File 12: Taking a coaching approach to leadership...a better way to relate to people!



Extracts from our Learning Guide: **The Coaching Leaders' Toolkit**

Why take a Coaching Approach?

Taking a coaching approach can give leaders a whole new way to relate to, and make the most of the resource you rely on most – your people.

It's a more effective, emotionally intelligent style of leadership – a very powerful, personalised way to motivate and build capacity, at the same time as improving bottom-line business results.

“Coaching helps employees perform better, enhances loyalty and job satisfaction (and) leads to lowers rates of turnover” says Daniel Goleman, the mouthpiece for emotional intelligence. “Done well, coaching boosts not just employees' capabilities but also their self-confidence, helping them function both more autonomously and at a higher performance level.” Daniel Goleman Working with Emotional Intelligence pp. 147



Think of the best leaders you've ever known. We bet most of them took a coaching approach.

Here's a couple of reasons why:

- ❑ Coaching significantly improves relationships and the way people 'warm-up' to their jobs.
- ❑ Workplaces with coaching cultures say they see significant improvements in terms of retaining staff, reduced conflict, open communication, job satisfaction and the general level of happiness and productivity.

From Coercion to Coaching

'Command-and-control' is out, **coaching** is in. People are pretty *dictator-and-directive resistant* these days. They want to be coached not coerced, encouraged not bossed around – especially our so-called Generation 'Y' staff.



“Generation Y reject any kind of dictatorial approach. The sit down, shut-up, do what you're told approach doesn't work with Generation Y, who resent and shy away from being told what to do. Generation Y do not like a

boss who is bossy. A new, more emotionally intelligent approach is required. Gen Y are very coachable.” Peter Sheehan Surviving and Thriving with Generation Y at Work pp. 45-46

Overly directive or pace-setting leaders with driving styles and an exclusive focus on results push people too hard, creating stress, anxiety, and under-nourished work relationships.



People nowadays demand self-responsibility, autonomy and challenge. Coaching taps into a deep-seated need we all have to challenge ourselves, achieve things that really matter to us and get results from our own initiative.

Coaching leaders are first and foremost capacity-builders. They put people first, knowing that great performance will follow.

A recent survey of Australian staff seems to point to the idea that they favour a coaching style of leadership above all other leadership styles. The challenge for organisations is to train their leaders to transit to a coaching style - and develop the work culture to foster a coaching approach.

Coaching Leaders in Action...

Whether we like it or not and whether we intend it to happen or not, most learning happens in the workplace – not away from it.

Traditional training's often divorced from the real workplace needs. The focus of coaching leaders is on learning *at work* – not away from it. So coaching leaders embed learning into all their everyday work processes. They're always alert to coaching moments and learning opportunities.

Coaching is a deliberate, structured process - an extended conversation that facilitates self-learning, skill development and performance improvement in others - either individually or in groups - to help them clarify issues, generate options, reach goals they set themselves, solve their own problems or meet new challenges by developing solutions and trying out actions to enhance performance and achieve goals that matter to them...

Coaching is a structured, two-way process that harnesses a person's potential in pursuit of specific goals that matter to them. It's a partnership with the person you're coaching.

But what does a coaching style of leadership look like in action?

Fact-File 12: Taking a coaching approach to leadership...a better way to relate to people!



Extracts from our Learning Guide: **The Coaching Leaders' Toolkit**

- ❑ **For a start, it's conversational.** Listening and questioning are major tools of a coaching leader. You're always willing to engage in conversations that extend beyond immediate workplace needs to help others reach goals and solve problems that matter to them
- ❑ **You use action-learning** to help people put together plans to reach their personal goals. You assist them analyse what's going on with a problem they're having, develop options and identify actions to try out their solutions
- ❑ **Your focus is person first.** You put people ahead of outcomes and results (they'll follow if you stick with it and do coaching well). You keep one eye on what's good for the organisation, the other helping people develop critical skills that link to their long-term career goals.
- ❑ **You give ongoing, constructive feedback** that builds motivation and you constantly encourage people to take on challenging assignments that stretch them
- ❑ **You're a guide.** You help others find the answers for themselves. You guide people to create their own solutions, not succumb to the temptation to work it out for them. You help them tap into what they know and find answers that are within themselves
- ❑ **You challenge and confront.** You help people rethink situations, reframe limiting beliefs, reflect on their approach to situations, events, themselves and their behaviour – old habits and patterns that hold us back, limit us and impact our performance.



- ❑ **You build relationships.** You realise your effectiveness depends on them and that often your coaching focuses on relationships too. Relationships that people you coach have with others around them often create much of the context for your coaching work.
- ❑ **You deal in feelings, genuinely.** Emotions are the essence of many coaching challenges. Emotional and social intelligence, are critical coaching leader competencies.



What it takes to be a Coaching Leader...

The main reason leaders have reservations about adopting a coaching approach is that they feel uncomfortable with the current level of their coaching skills and often lack useful coaching tools. Sometimes, this is combined with fears a coaching approach may expose personal weaknesses and deficits in terms of people skills.

So what does it take to be a coaching leader? Here are some capabilities and characteristics of effective coaching leaders we think are important:

- ❑ **Self-awareness and personal mastery:** All coaching leaders need to be able to discuss things like values, choice, emotions, thinking and behaviour patterns with people they coach. This means being a learner yourself.
- ❑ **Empathy and understanding:** Being able to empathise with other's emotions, understand different world views, values, emotions, fears and aspirations rather than invalidate or pass judgement builds trust – the foundation of any good coaching relationship.
- ❑ **Relationship & rapport-building:** Coaching leaders need to build rapport and establish trust. The coaching relationship won't work unless you're seen as friendly, open, honest, authentic, and approachable – someone who can be confided in and opened up to.

Summarising US research into coaching, Daniel Goleman concludes: *"An open and trusting relationship is the key to success as coaches? The best coaches show a genuine interest personal interest in those they guide, and have empathy for and an understanding of their employees. Coaches who showed respect, trustworthiness, and empathy were the best."* Daniel Goleman *Working with Emotional Intelligence* pp. 147-148



Fact-File 12: Taking a coaching approach to leadership...a better way to relate to people!



Extracts from our Learning Guide: **The Coaching Leaders' Toolkit**

- ❑ **Energising & inspirational:** A capacity to inspire others helps them focus and stick to working through often difficult issues, limits or constraints. Coaching leaders operate from positive appreciation. You encourage and building on strengths rather than focusing on deficits, diminishing people or their abilities.
- ❑ **Flexibility of approach:** Most of all, this means meeting the priorities of the person you're coaching, not your own. Resisting the urge to do it for them and allowing them to discover their own insights and solutions.
- ❑ **Mental agility:** Being able to adapt coaching strategies and tools *in the moment* to fit the emerging needs of people you coach and helping them analyse a situation and come up with actions, rather than provide answers.
- ❑ **Conversational capability:** Connecting with the people you coach through conversations – which helps you understand others, maintain constructive, open and creative relationships, challenge respectfully and resolve conflict and difference.
- ❑ **Perspective-takers:** Coaching leaders help people sort out the range of issues in any given situation, to see how they relate to each other and the big picture. They provide clarity and context for meaningful discussions to occur among individuals and teams, help others understand their own and other's perspectives and see alternatives.



There are 2 other important things about coaching leaders. First, they always look out for growth opportunities in themselves and others. And second, they accept full accountability for everything that happens in taking a coaching approach. They make themselves part of the solution as well as actively engage others to seek solutions to problems rather than assign blame.

Coaching Maps & Game-Plans

Whatever the coaching context, all coaches need maps and game-plans – processes and tools to help you work in a structured way with the person you're coaching.

Coaching is a bit like a trip you plan to take together. The coaching leader acts like a guide. Like any trip, you to know where you're starting from, where you aim to get to, what route you'll take and a couple of alternatives. You also know about the different ways people choose to travel, what the milestones may be along the way and typical setbacks they're likely to encounter.

▲ 5-Stage Coaching Process



Although the particular paths coaching leaders take may be different, at a deeper level, all follow a similar, general process. There are 5 broad stages you'll work through – whatever the context – as this diagram shows.

These 5 stages map out broad roles, phases and activities in the coaching process. Each stage demands different coaching tools and strategies.

Stage 1: Contact & Contracting: First contact is critical. It may be a matter of minutes informally, as you see a coaching moment emerge at work or part of a formal, planned number of sessions you're intending to have with someone

Stage 2: Rapport-Building: Involves creating a safe and relaxed coaching climate characterised by unconditional positive regard – establishing you as a supportive, trustworthy person who is nevertheless willing to confront when needed.

Stage 3: Goal Setting: Is an important milestone in any coaching context – helping people explore their needs, performance challenges, set goals then identify actions to take to achieve them.

Stage 4: Continuous Coaching Cycles: Once goals are identified, coaching revolves around a *continuous loop cycle* of action, review, reflection, feedback, followed by more successive try-out actions that move people in small steps towards their goals.

Fact-File 12: Taking a coaching approach to leadership...a better way to relate to people!



Extracts from our Learning Guide: **The Coaching Leaders' Toolkit**

Stage 5: Change Actions is where people once equipped with new tools, learn how to create the practice opportunities they need with less and less coaching support, encouraging self-reliance.

Coaching Leaders – Helps & Hinders

As you ease yourself into the coaching leader role, there's bound to be obstacles, just as they'll be things that help you in this transition too.

Here's some **success factors** – things that help:

- You learn to use conversational coaching tools to elicit experiences, learning, wisdom
- You become more approachable, known for seeing possibilities others miss and having a personal vision that inspires others
- You see unrealised potential in people where others just see problems and build rapport
- You can challenge others and give feedback without making them feel criticised



And here's some **things that get in the way**...

- Expecting coaching to provide a "quick fix" to performance or using it to "fix" other people
- Coaching from your own agenda – feeling you have to be the expert/have the answers
- Lack of recognition of people's differences in motivation, commitment and awareness
- Difficulty establishing close relationships based on trust or a need to control others
- Impatience with other's reluctance to change – seeing it and resistance as the same thing
- Underestimating peoples' potential – and failing to appreciate, respect and empower
- Lack of perseverance, resilience and self-awareness

Done badly, of course, the coaching style looks a lot like micro-managing.

Done well, it builds self-sufficiency and trust, strengthen capabilities and relationships and can have a highly positive impact on the emotional climate of teams and workplaces.

The Coaching Leaders Clinic

More leaders would probably take on a coaching role if they had some help with the how. One of the big obstacles is a lack of know-how and confidence.

Part of supporting the transition to a coaching role is equipping you with tools and practice opportunities that assist you to learn how to do this safely. And that's what The Change Forum's **Coaching Leaders' Clinic** is all about.

If you want to turn your leaders into coaches, **'The Coaching Leaders' Clinic: Learning to be a Coaching Leader'** can be delivered in-house as a useful adjunct to your leadership learning or coaching culture strategy.

Segments of the clinic can also be delivered individually through personalised coaching sessions. Want to find out "what all this coaching stuff is about"? Download a copy of our **Coaching Prospectus**. It gives you some simple, straightforward answers to help you make up your mind whether our coaching approach might suit you.



This FactFile is taken from **The Coaching Leaders Toolkit** – the Guide that accompanies our 2-day **Coaching Leaders Clinic** – Module 9

of *The Learning-Centred Leadership Series*® Copyright Bill Cropper, The Change Forum 2003-8. You are permitted to copy this FactFile in small quantities within your own organisation for learning exchange, provided this acknowledgement appears on all copies and any materials derived from it.

The Change Forum runs a practical, 2-day coaching clinic on how to adopt a more coaching approach to leadership as well as offering individual coaching for those who prefer more personalised support. For a full brochure on **The Coaching Leaders' Clinic**, a public course calendar and our **Coaching Services Prospectus**...

☎: **07-4068 7591**

💻: coaching@thechangeforum.com

🌐: www.thechangeforum.com