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The heart of coaching: Developing a coaching model for the manager

The coaching sector has mushroomed in the last five years. In 1999 working as a chief executive I never thought about whether I needed an executive coach. Now, sitting on the opposite side of the table senior managers have come to believe this is an indispensable part of their personal development. Coaching's popularity has spread to managers, who are keen to add the approach to their range of skills. The work of writers such as Goleman (2002) has highlighted the benefits of coaching as one of a variety of styles that successful managers use. He suggested that when combined with developing a clear vision, sharing this vision with others, and involving others to build plans, managers can build long-term strength in organisations. Managers recognise this but have been struggling to get coaching to work for them. For most organisations managers operate their coaching practice without a model, and this tends to feel more like 'tell' than 'ask', even when the manager calls it coaching. For organisations which do offer a developmental style the GROW model is ubiquitous. Once learned, managers have little space to further develop what they do, or to think more widely about the questions they ask. To support this developmental need we have developed a manager's coaching model which is rooted in the behaviouralist traditions of GROW, but helps managers to think through what they should be doing. We don't see this as a replacement of GROW, which we think is a simple but robust goal focused model well suited to executive coaching (Passmore 2003). Instead we see this model as a manager's guide to using GROW. We have called this the 'Heart of Coaching Model'.

1. Goal

The Goal stage in the GROW model is concerned with establishing a clear objective. We have suggested that this be broken down into three sub-elements; to establish whether there is a need for coaching, to reach agreement that coaching is acceptable as an approach in the eyes of all parties involved and lastly, to clarify the goal. Consideration firstly needs to be given to the organization and its culture. Managers operate within organizational cultures which may support or may undermine a coaching style. Where the organization is supportive of coaching, coaching is more likely to be accepted by team members as helpful and supportive. In cultures where coaching is abnormal, employees may be less willing to openly discuss their performance or their feelings. The development of a coaching culture is not arrived at overnight, but its existence will be a key building block to using coaching conversations as a management style. To develop a coaching culture, organizations would benefit from talking about what management styles

they currently value and why these approaches are valued? Also worth exploring would be the assumptions that underpin the current dominant management styles.

(a) The employee's needs

A key issue to consider at this stage is which of these styles is appropriate for the employee, given the situation? Is the issue developmental? Is it more about reward or punishment? In our view a coaching style best suits situations where the manager is seeking to develop the understanding of an individual. In these situations the employee has some knowledge about a topic, so a directive style is less appropriate but is not yet an expert to whom they can delegate the whole process.

(b) Agreement

Having made the decision that coaching is appropriate within the culture, appropriate to the situation and appropriate to the individual, the next issue is consent. Coaching requires consent from three parties; senior managers, the employee and the manager coach. For a senior manager, the consent may be implicit assuming two conditions, the organization supports a coaching approach or has a coaching culture and the individual is not facing disciplinary proceeding. For the employee, launching into a different style of working can be confusing. A discussion about supporting the employee's develop may set a context where an implicit agreement emerges. A more formal agreement where the manager talks about coaching and its benefits can be equally helpful. The third person is the manager. Has the manager the skills and awareness to use a different management style? Coaching is a style which relies on an ability to use questions rather than answers, a style which is more nondirective than directive.

(c) Goal clarification

At this part the 'manager coach' explores the goals; what do we want to achieve? Again this understanding of what the goal is needs to be clearly held by the organization, by the individual and by the manager. The organization's knowledge of the goal is most likely to be expressed in a written document. This may be the corporate plan, a service or unit plan or for more junior staff in personal objectives or a forward job plan. The objectives are likely to have been agreed between or set by the manager. So there is an expectation the manager will understand these from their own position, but is there a shared view with the employee. It is often at this point that clarification of what the goal means is helpful. All parties need to hold a common and clear understanding of the goal.

2. Reality

This is the second stage in the model. At this stage we are concerned with establishing current performance or the current situation. We suggest that there are two sub-stages to this; gathering information from a range of sources and assessing the situation using the evidence which has been collected.

(a) Data gathering

At the data gathering phase the 'manager coach' needs to hold a clear view about what information the employee needs to gather to build a clear picture of the situation, The 'manager coach' will use questions to direct the focus of the employee to these aspects of performance to ensure the employee builds up a holistic reports. Once the employee has yielded all the data they can obtain, the 'manager coach' may add to this providing their perspective. This may personal feedback of their experience of the employee, or could be drawn from previous observations which the manager coach has recorded. As with all feedback, the data need to be specific, detailed and based on behaviour rather than personal observation.

(b) Assessment

The assessment process is the second part of the reality stage. At this point the 'manager coach' needs to make a judgment about their own ability to assess the information which has been shared. For most managers a detailed understanding of the sector or the work area will enable such an understanding. But for the manager new to an area or without technical knowledge in the subject area independent input can help them to make such judgments. The 'manager coach' needs to be able to identify who can assist them in this process, in developing an understanding which they can then bring to bear in the discussion with their employee.

3. Options

The Options stage is the third stage in the GROW model. The focus is on generating and evaluating a wide range of alternatives to improve or resolve the issue and to achieve the goal expressed at the start. For us this involves two phases; generating the maximum number of alternative options and evaluating the options.

(a) Generating the options

During the options generating phase the aim is to help the employee to generate

the maximum number of options. How many is difficult to assess, but in any situation having four to eight options to consider offers a reasonable number of alternatives. To increase the number of options the 'manager coach' may encourage the employee to consider how others might view the situation. The use of the VIP innovation technique can be helpful. This involves imagining how important people, such as Winston Churchill to Nelson Mandela, may address the issue if they faced it. Other techniques which are helpful at this stage are attribute listing and storyboarding. By adopting different creative approaches, additional options may be added to the original thoughts from the employee. Once this has been completed, the manager can take a more directive approach through questions to focus attention on other options which may have been missed. An ideal outcome is to have a range of options which spread across the risk range; from those which are low risk or high risk options to others which may hold higher risks but offer higher rewards.

(b) Evaluating the options

At this sub-stage we suggest the coach needs to move to establishing the criteria which the options will be evaluated against. This involves a similar brainstorming or ideas generating exercise to the options generation. However, once established the employee needs to move to a systematic evaluation of the options which they have generated. The 'manager coach' needs to ensure the employee considers both risks and benefits, and once again should act to ensure the employee does not miss obvious points through directing the employee's attention to these through questions.

4. Way Forward

The fourth stage in the GROW model is the Way Forward, or is sometimes called Will to Act. The way forward is the action planning stage of the model. We have suggested that there are four parts to this stage which can help the manager. These are agreeing a final plan, clarifying what the success criteria are for the plan and lastly agreeing a series of steps towards the plan which would help in tracking progress.

(a) Action plan

At the action plan sub-stage the aim is to ensure a clear shared plan of action is established. The plan needs to be clear in the mind of the 'manager coach' and the employee. From our experience an employee who has generated the goal is likely to be committed to it. However, there is value in talking about motivation. Motivation to act has three components; willingness to act, ability to act, readiness to act (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). How important is the goal to the employee? How able does the employee feel to achieve the goal? What priority does the goal have

compared to other priorities? The coach may ask the employee to rate each out of 10, high scores are more likely to be matched by action.

(b) Measures of success

Being highly motivated will not be enough in an organizational context. We are aware that while the goal may have been described and is understood by both, it may lack explicit measures of success. We advocate measures which have clear time limits and which have staging points. This allows the manager coach and employee to assess how they are getting along after a month, three months or a year if the goal is a long-range career goal.

(c) Tracking progress

Tracking progress is an important part of the process; how and when will the reviews take place? Also important is to ensure that the dates of reviews mirror the tracking measures which the 'manager coach' and employee have agreed. The 'manager coach' then needs to ensure these tracking events take place and that a coaching style is used to help the employee to remain on track or adjust their behaviours to move closer to the desired tracking or sub- goals.

(d) Evaluation

The evaluation phase builds on this ensuring that both parties are clear about the process for evaluation and that this evaluation meeting takes place. This is about holding the employee to account. In a management relationship which uses coaching we would suggest that the review is focused on learning from events, rather than identifying and punishing error.

(e) Refinement

The final phase we would advocate within the Way Forward is to refine the goal, moving from special task behaviour to incorporating the behaviour into everyday practice. It is often helpful to explore with the employee what may get in the way of making coaching part of their everyday behaviour. A final discussion may be to reflect of what needs to be done next. This is likely to lead the 'manager coach' and their employee back to the start of the process and a new set of goals.

Conclusion

This model is designed to help manager's developing their coaching practice, without moving towards more 'psychological' techniques of cognitive behavioural coaching such as exploring and challenging automatic thoughts or motivation and

aspects of the unconscious. Its behavioural focus means that managers can feel safe using these and add to their existing knowledge and skills of using GROW.

References

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