



Top tips for coaching

Matt Somers shares some valuable hints and tips to help everyone get coaching

Top tip #1: Get managers cycling!

Don't worry, this doesn't mean that you're going to have to order a load of bicycles and have your managers pedalling around the office yelling coaching instructions.

The cycle here is David Kolb's learning cycle. A model which helps us understand the conditions that must be satisfied for real, lasting learning to take place.

Kolb suggested that we need to:

- Plan the experience
- Have the experience
- Reflect on the experience
- Draw conclusions from the experience

Applying this to the idea of training managers as coaches, the training must involve:

- Each manager articulating a personal learning objective (planning)
- A variety of exercises and activities to suit different learning styles (doing)
- Time for individual and group reviews (reflecting)
- Action planning (concluding)

Top tip #2: Coaching is best developed by doing

Good coaching skills training should involve opportunities to practise, practise, practise - accompanied by useful feedback. However, people can find the thought of this off-putting, especially if they've been used to attending courses that involve traditional role play. This usually means two reluctant people performing at the front of the classroom while everyone else is busy breathing a sigh of relief that they weren't picked! The scenarios are usually scripted and the feedback received poor. Not a lot of learning happens in such a set up.

Here's how I set up the practise sessions in our coaching skills training:

Divide the group into trios. If you can't divide the group into three, you may need some people to work in pairs, without an observer.

The three roles are:

Coach - who is practicing using coaching questions and the underlying principles

Coachee - who is providing the practice opportunity for the coach

Observer - who monitors coaching process

Swap roles so that everyone has a turn at being the coach.

The emphasis must be on the coach. If the coachee finishes with an action step that's great, but this isn't really the purpose of the exercise.

The observer should focus on what they noticed the coach doing, rather than offering their opinion as to how the coachee should solve their problem.

Encourage reviewing the experience before the next person takes a turn as coach.

Top tip #3: Notice what you focus on

My friend and mentor, the late Sir John Whitmore, said: "the mind is key but who holds the key to your mind?" In other words, when you need to perform under pressure do you expect things to go well or badly? If twelve people praise you but one criticizes, whose comments do you dwell on for the rest of the day? Coaching can help you develop a positive mindset.

Use coaching to help you and your team focus on the things that actually deliver your results.

The ultimate aim of coaching is to improve the quality of thinking in the people who are being coached. This is based on the simple logic that because everything we do is preceded by thought, then an improvement in thinking will result in an improvement in outcome.

This becomes crucial when we realise that instruction or demonstration doesn't really promote high quality thinking. Actually it encourages people to stop thinking for themselves and to become reliant on us instead. We need to ask, not tell. We need to pose questions that get people to pay attention to what's happening and cause them to think before they respond.

Top tip #3: Be clear about what coaching can achieve

On our training programmes we often ask participants to discuss what coaching is, and what it isn't, which can be really illuminating. The following lists would be typical:

Coaching is...

- About drawing out, not putting in
- Helping others to learn as opposed to teaching them things
- Motivational and enjoyable
- Performance focused but people centred
- About releasing potential
- Helping people move out of their comfort zones

Coaching is not...

- Telling people what to do and how to do it
- The same as instructing, training or counselling
- Offering uninvited feedback
- Rescuing people and having all the answers
- Only for poor performers
- A disciplinary measure

Typical situations for which coaching is used. To...

- Accelerate development
- Improve team working as well as individual performance
- Develop new attitudes, behaviour and skills
- Support people through change, perhaps part of a change programme
- Help people address workplace challenges
- Encourage a learning culture
- Keep everyone motivated



Top tip #5: Think about the location for coaching

On our coaching skills programmes we encourage our participants to practice outside wherever possible and weather permitting. This isn't just to give people a good time (although coaching is undoubtedly more successful when it's enjoyable) but to recognize that successful coaching requires people to feel at ease and free from distractions.

When you become skilled at coaching you'll be able to coach pretty much anywhere and anytime, but to begin with it's probably best to hold coaching sessions in a separate room or office.

Here's a checklist of things to think about:

- ✓ Have you allowed plenty of time?
- ✓ Is it easy to listen well in the place you've chosen?
- ✓ Is it completely private?
- ✓ Is the seating comfortable?
- ✓ Is the temperature comfortable?
- ✓ Do you have some thinking tools (e.g. pen and paper, flipchart, etc)?
- ✓ Will the room be a positive anchor?

The last point is vital. The places in which coaching takes place should be associated with doing well. Over time it's quite possible for people to feel more motivated and resourceful just by being there.



About Matt Somers

Matt Somers is the founder and Managing Director of Coaching Skills Training, a specialist training consultancy focused on the idea of the leader as coach. It operates throughout the UK and beyond, working in partnership with clients to ensure that what is intended is achieved. It has a wide and varied client list including charities.

As advocates of the coaching approach Matt works hard to make sure clients are able to continue developing the skills learned long after any initial project has finished.

He is a leading voice on training and coaching in the UK publishing *Coaching at Work* in 2006 and *Coaching in a Week* in 2016. He holds an MSc in Human Resource Development and is a Fellow of the CIPD.

Find out more at: www.mattsomers.com