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WHAT IS THIS COACHING STUFF?

INTRODUCTORY

PERSPECTIVES OF COACHING

To help you start defining what coaching is, read the following excerpts from imaginary coaching sessions and write down the things you notice or observe about the process that the manager uses (as opposed to the content). The first is the typical form of one-on-one's we find most managers currently use:



MANAGER:

GEORGE: MANAGER: GEORGE:

MANAGER:

George, can I have a moment with you? Please come through to my office.

Yes, Mr Smith.

George, I need to talk to you about your sales figures.

Yes, Mr Smith. As I have been saying for the last few months, the industry and the market are changing. Our competitors have come out with products that really outshine our products and those that haven't are experiencing exactly the same

results as I am.

George, I am not interested in what our competitors are experiencing. I am under pressure from my bosses to give them the results they want and I am running out of time to do so. I am afraid that, if you don't provide the results, I will need to find someone who can, but that's not the way I want to play it. I would rather you succeeded. So, here's what I want you to do. First, let's have a look at your prospect list and your sales report. It seems that you haven't seen half of your prospects for over four months.

GEORGE: *No, Sir. The report is misleading. It's also incomplete. You see, I didn't have time to fill in all the people I have seen. I find these reports time consuming and I really think they take me away from the stuff I should be doing – being in the field making sales calls and...*

MANAGER: *That may be so, George, but I know for a fact that you haven't seen ABC (Pty) Ltd for four months and they used to be our biggest customer before you took them over.*

GEORGE: *Are you saying that it's my fault that they don't buy from us anymore? It's...*

MANAGER: *No, what I am trying to say...*

GEORGE: *Sorry, Sir, I take exception to...*

MANAGER: *George, I am sorry you take exception to what I am saying, but what I am trying to find is a way out of this mess. Now listen to me. What I have to say is important. I want to do everything I can to help you. And what we have to do is very urgent. So, I want you to drop everything you had planned today. I want you to bring your diary to me now so that we can do an exercise. We are going to look at when last you saw each of your customers and prospects and we are going to enter the information correctly in the report. We are then going to rate the importance of each of them and are going to decide which of them rate as the lowest-hanging fruit. We are then going to draw up a calling plan for you to go and see those over the next 10 days. We are also going to go over your specific approach to them in each case so that we can optimise the chances of our making a sale. How does that sound? Would this approach be helpful to you?*

GEORGE: *Okay. Do you want me to fetch my diary now? I will need to spend about an hour rescheduling today's diary...*

COACHING PRACTICE

WRITE DOWN EVERYTHING YOU NOTICE – ABOUT THE MANAGER'S APPROACH AND GEORGE'S RESPONSES, THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SESSION, AND SO ON. FOCUS ON THE PROCESS RATHER THAN THE CONTENT. BE SPECIFIC. WHAT ELSE DID YOU NOTICE? OF THE VARIOUS THINGS YOU NOTICED, WHAT STANDS OUT FOR YOU? WHY?

Now let's have a look at how that session might have looked if the manager had been using coaching as his management style for some time.

MANAGER: *George, can I have a moment with you? Please come through to my office.*

GEORGE: *Yes, Mr Smith.*

MANAGER: *George, I need to talk to you about your sales figures.*

GEORGE: *Yes, Mr Smith. As I have been saying for the last few months, the industry and the market are changing. Our competitors have come out with products that really outshine our products and those that haven't are experiencing exactly the same results as I am.*

MANAGER: *Yes, George, I think I have built up an understanding of how you see things over the last few months. Nevertheless, we are in this predicament and we need to find a way, or ways, to help you achieve your targets...*

GEORGE: *Yes, Mr Smith. But I don't think you understand fully. This is just how it is. I am doing my damndest, but it is just how things are out there. There is nothing we can do but ride it out until we come up with new products or the market changes...*

MANAGER: *Let's for a moment assume you are right, George. How long do you think you could last on your present level of commission?*

GEORGE: *Actually, I wanted to speak to you about an advance if things don't get better. I am under a lot of pressure and...*

MANAGER: *I understand, George – so what you're telling me is that you can't last much longer. What if we are unable to give you an advance? You know that current policy doesn't allow that?*

GEORGE: *Yes, Sir, I know, but I was hoping that we could come to some arrangement.*

MANAGER: *George, we need to get back to the issue of this discussion. Can we come back to the discussion of whether or not the company can assist you? Do you agree, however, that what you are saying is that you cannot keep going like this*

unless you are able to borrow money from somewhere? Do you understand that that might merely exacerbate your problem?

GEORGE: *Yes, Mr Smith.*

MANAGER: *And, George, how long do you think this department can go on accepting this low level of revenue from you? You know that the department relies heavily on the revenue from its small sales team, especially since it historically has the highest target. What is the impact therefore if it consistently doesn't hit target?*

GEORGE: *I know, but it's really tough out there.*

MANAGER: *I know it's tough out there, George, but do you see that we can't just lie down here? What will happen ultimately if you and I don't find a solution to this issue?*

GEORGE: *I guess ultimately we close down. But...* **MANAGER:** *That's how I see it too. So, how would you feel if the two of us*

spent the day finding possible solutions to remedy matters?

GEORGE: *That would be fine, but I have a couple of calls with customers scheduled.*

MANAGER: *Are they sales calls – calls from which you are expecting sales?*

GEORGE: *I guess not – I was really just trying to keep in touch with my customers. Perhaps what you have in mind is more important. I'll just ask Susan to make the calls.*

(Five minutes later)

MANAGER: *I know that you have told me there are a whole lot of things beyond your control that are impacting on your sales figures. Let's explore things that are within your control, things that you might actually do. What are the most obvious ones to you?*

GEORGE: *I suppose the most obvious one is if I increase the number of calls I make to properly qualified prospects and to customers who used to buy most regularly from us – then I would have more chance of being successful.*

MANAGER: *So one option is if we increase our energy in terms of the lowest-hanging branches. Okay, what else might we try?*

GEORGE: *Perhaps I have gone stale or am not approaching sales calls with the same energy or focus as I used to. I often just seem to be going through the motions. It would really help me if you could coach me through this.*

MANAGER: *Sure, that's another option. What else?*

GEORGE: *I am not sure. I think that's about all.*

MANAGER: *Okay, but let's see if we can't find more. Let's say we employed a successful sales manager from our biggest competitor, XYZ – we're not about to by the way – what do you think her approach might be?*

GEORGE: *Well, I guess employing her might in fact be an option. But knowing Margaret, I think she would probably start by looking at what other players are doing in the market and whether our prospect list is up to date.*

MANAGER: *Okay, anything else?* **GEORGE:** *No, I think that's it. Okay.*

MANAGER: *So let's start working on these options. Which do you think would make the biggest difference in the shortest amount of time? Shall we start with that and then work through the others?*

COACHING PRACTICE

WHAT DID YOU NOTICE IN THIS EXAMPLE? WRITE EVERYTHING YOU NOTICED DOWN. WHAT WERE THE DIFFERENCES IN APPROACH? WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OR ATTRIBUTES OF EACH APPROACH? WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF EACH APPROACH OVER THE OTHER? WHAT ELSE DID YOU NOTICE? OF THE VARIOUS THINGS YOU NOTICED, WHAT STANDS OUT FOR YOU? WHY?

TO DIRECT OR NOT TO DIRECT – THAT IS THE QUESTION!

These excerpts illustrate two approaches to coaching – a directive approach and a non-directive approach.

The directive approach is the one that we see most commonly in our organisations and on our sports fields – where managers tell, yell, demonstrate, advise or suggest what needs to be done and the team members then go off and do what they have been told to do. Well, that's what we hope they will do! Sometimes, we also play back our own autobiographical videos to our team members when we want to guide them or answer their questions using our experience. In short, directive coaching goes something like this: we have something to say to one of our team members – as was the case with George above in the first example – and so we tell it to him or her. There is no real input from our team members. What it amounts to is the manager sharing his or her wisdom, knowledge, experience, skills, etcetera, with the team member.

Is this approach as effective as we assume it is? The following are the results of a study the source of which we have not been able to find – there have been several

such studies and we believe that, even without validation, we all know intuitively that the figures are more or less accurate (Whitmore 2002:22). The figures relate to the different levels of recall of information, after three weeks and after three months, where the information has been conveyed in different ways – where the person was told the information, told and shown the information, told, shown and experienced the learning, and where he or she has been coached non-directively:

	TOLD	TOLD AND SHOWN	TOLD, SHOWN AND EXPERIENCED	FACILITATED, NON-DIRECTIVE
Recall after 3 weeks	70%	72%	85%	100%
Recall after 3 months	10%	32%	65%	95%

Virtually all the managers we have shown these statistics to have indicated that they believe they are more or less correct. Even if the figure in the “told” column for recall after three months is wrong and is half the truth (ie, that it should be 20 percent) and the figure for recall over the same period for “facilitated, non-directive” is overstated by 100 percent (ie, that it should be 47,5 percent), non-directive coaching is at least twice as effective as directive coaching.

The more difficult question for all of us as managers, then, is: why do we go back to telling? Habit, expediency? Sure, but shouldn't we spend some time learning how to help our people to learn more effectively? Wouldn't this help our people do their jobs better? Wouldn't it mean that we are more effective too?

Moreover, what about the (numerous, daily) cases where our team members come to ask us for answers to queries and problems they are experiencing? They come in, they ask, we answer, they go out and hopefully implement our answer. Then the next time they have a query, they come back, they ask, they go out and hopefully implement our answer. And the next time? And the next?

The truth is that they will keep coming back to ask us questions while we keep giving the answers. Wouldn't we do the same thing? But what are they learning in the process? Only to be dependent on us. There is little real learning happening – how many have come in weeks later and referred to the question they asked weeks earlier and asked if you remembered what your answer was? Alternatively, how often have we given our team members our sage advice and found them, perhaps weeks later, doing what they have always done?

However, let's now look at how this same scenario plays out between us and *our* bosses – that is, when we are the team members. Isn't it true that we go to them to

ask them a question because they are knowledgeable, have more experience, etcetera, but that, more often than not, when they give their answer we check it in our own minds? If it is not obviously correct, we put a question mark against it. We might ask for some clarification from them and may sometimes even reject the answer and ask someone else, or even do what we think is correct. Isn't the real truth that we accept some answers, but discard several if they don't sit well with us? Why would our team members not do the same thing after hearing some of our answers?

Deep down, don't we prefer team members who think for themselves rather than requiring us to help them with every single thing that crosses their minds or desks? Don't we really just love it when we know there are team members that are self-starters and who can be left to get on with the job? Don't they invariably get better results in their performance appraisals? Most importantly, aren't they generally more effective in their roles?

THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

"Ah!" we hear you say, "but I have knowledge and expertise and experience that I need to pass on!" In other words, "I am the expert!" And well we might be in many areas. But does giving our team members the answers constitute the best way for them to learn?

COACHING PRACTICE

WELL, TRY THE FOLLOWING "JOIN-THE-DOTS" EXERCISE:

THE RULES ARE AS FOLLOWS:

DO THIS EXERCISE EVEN IF YOU HAVE DONE IT BEFORE.

EVEN IF YOU ARE USING ONLY A PENCIL, IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE USING A WAX CRAYON – THE TYPE THAT YOUR YOUNG CHILDREN MAY USE TO COLOUR IN.

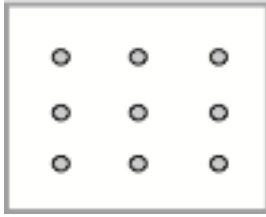
THE OBJECTIVE IS TO JOIN ALL THE DOTS WITHOUT LIFTING YOUR PEN:

O ALL LINES MUST BE STRAIGHT.

O YOU MAY NOT USE MORE THAN FOUR STRAIGHT LINES.

O YOU MAY NOT GO THROUGH ANY DOT MORE THAN ONCE.

O YOU MAY NOT RETRACE ANY LINES. GIVE YOURSELF TWO MINUTES TO COMPLETE THE EXERCISE.



We have done this exercise with several hundred managers and the answer we get from those who have done it before is the following: You can start at any corner, but, for present purposes, start at the bottom right dot, move diagonally to the top left dot, then “turn” left and proceed past the bottom left dot so that you are in line with an imaginary line running from the middle dot on the right through the middle dot on the bottom; now draw the line from that spot (which is out of the box, so to speak) along the imaginary line through those middle dots we have just mentioned to a spot in line with the three dots on the top, “turn” left and finish at the top left dot. What you should have is an arrow-like shape like the one drawn in appendix B on page 334.

Now let us explain what has happened in respect of the more than 600 managers we have trained (and what *you* probably did in the exercise if you had done it before). Where managers had done it before – and approximately 10 to 15 percent of the managers we engaged fell into this category – once they remembered what the solution was, they drew the arrow and then sat back and simply watched their peers battling it out. All of them came up with the same solution. At the end of the two-minute period, they proudly showed the others this solution. Now, here’s the thing. Does this mean there are no other solutions? In fact, there are about five other answers. Now, here’s a more important thing. Why did none of the significant number of managers in our groups who had the answers ever look for an alternative answer to the one they had previously arrived at? Doesn’t it have something to do with the fact that, when we know the answer to something, or if something has worked for us in the past – in other words, if we are “experts” in relation to something – we merely (probably mindlessly) apply what we know without ever considering whether there is another answer?

“But,” you may answer, “if it has always worked that way, why change it? After all, it’s probably the right answer.”

Our response would be: “How do we know it’s the best solution if we have never looked for the other solutions?”

There are several aspects to this that we should consider:

1. First, and most importantly, it’s not only about getting the job done. Isn’t it about getting the job done in the most effective way possible? What would the ultimate result be if we kept searching for better ways to do the things we are doing? Wouldn’t we be running smarter businesses? Medical science has always been regarded as anything but theory. There has been an absoluteness about it. Yet we no longer bleed people with leeches to bring

down a fever, do we? And there are a host of other fundamental changes that have taken place in recent years. We even regard alternative medicine as less alternative these days. The point is that the answers we have are not necessarily the correct answers just because we say so. Shouldn't we always be searching for better solutions?

2. Secondly, shouldn't our response to our team members' questions be aimed at ensuring that the team members learn sufficiently and in a way that they are able to get it done independently next time? Shouldn't we always ask ourselves, "What is the best way I can help George to learn in these circumstances?" If they are asking questions, then there is stuff they obviously don't know. That is, there is stuff about the job they need to learn. Our current directive approach to managing emphasises our teaching role, that is, *what* information we give them to better enable them to do the job. It doesn't concentrate on the *how*. Surely, what *they learn* is more important than what we teach. Merely giving them the information is less than half the job done, particularly if they don't understand and just do what we tell them. They will almost certainly have to come back to us again next time. Surely we should start emphasising the learning side of the equation more than our teaching side?
3. In a similar vein, time and time again managers tell us not only that their team members interrupt them continuously with questions and queries, but also that they cannot believe how many times they have to give the same response to the same question from the same person. If we think about it, isn't it clear that, if people keep coming to us for answers and solutions, they are probably allowing us to do the thinking for them? If someone kept filling in the gaps for you, wouldn't you just keep going back to them for answers? (And are you surprised that you keep getting interrupted?) Going back to our previous point, doesn't the fact that some team members repeat the same questions support the notion that they are not learning anything by this method anyway?
4. Interestingly enough, in all our programme workshops, only two people so far have come up with alternative solutions, and neither had ever done the exercise before! If someone had been facilitating or non-directively coaching all the participants who had not done the exercise before, how many different alternative solutions might have resulted? If those that thought they had the answer could only come up with the answer they knew, but others that did not have the answer were able to come up with other possible solutions, doesn't that put paid to the notion that we as managers (who think we have the answers) provide the best solutions (when we have not considered any other solutions)?
5. Finally, the ultimate goal for us as manager coaches is that our team members start to self-coach, that they begin to self-diagnose, self-generate and self-correct. Aren't they more likely to do that as they are required to think more about their solutions? They become challenged by us to deal with the issues they raise and we help them to reach their own best solutions. Sooner or later (normally sooner), they start challenging themselves in the same way and start coming to you with increasingly improved solutions. It is not long before

they don't need to interrupt you at all, because both you and they have confidence in the quality of the solutions they arrive at.

SO, WHAT IS DIRECTIVE AND NON-DIRECTIVE COACHING?

From the above you will have gathered that *directive* coaching –

- ↓ involves telling, suggesting, advising and demonstrating what needs to be done from the perspective of the manager

- ↓ is therefore dependent on the expertise, frame of reference and interpretation of the manager and his or her ability to communicate this in a way that the team member can digest and implement

- ↓ is based on a hierarchical relationship. On the other hand, *non-directive* coaching is a way of discussing things with our people so that –

 - ↓ we raise their understanding and awareness

 - ↓ they are in a position to achieve their best answer and learning

 - ↓ they commit to their own decisions

 - ↓ their performance is optimised in a sustainable manner

 - ↓ they learn to – diagnose their own challenges generate their own solutions correct their own behaviour. The ultimate goal of non-directive coaching, therefore, is for the team member to learn to self-coach.

DEFINING COACHING MORE FORMALLY

From a manager's perspective, then, coaching is a toolbox for assisting our team members to improve their performance and achieve their goals. In this sense, we will typically need to coach in three broad areas: (1) helping our team members to solve a problem, (2) providing them with certain skills, and (3) assisting them in their overall development in their current position and, maybe, for a future function. In doing so, we are helping them to close the gap between where they want or need to be and where they are now. In broad terms, we do this by –

collaboratively assessing their performance discussing and reaching a shared understanding of their present situation defining achievable goals exploring new possibilities and initiatives supporting them in their plan of action.

Coaching refers both to specific interactive skills – used both in everyday informal situations and in more structured situations – and the encouragement of long-term

learning. Typically, the most structured coaching for managers is their annual or biannual performance appraisal when they look at a team member's performance against targets, define the gap and discuss how to move forward. Less structured or formal coaching sessions would be meetings we might have with those team members on a monthly, fortnightly or even weekly basis. The least formal coaching sessions are those we might have when we bump into them in the corridor and follow up informally on their progress against something we have previously discussed with them. An alternative, informal coaching opportunity arises whenever a team member has a query, an enquiry, an issue – that is, almost every time he or she knocks on the manager coach's door with a question. All these circumstances, and many more, lend themselves to the use of coaching skills, and, the more we use them, the more coaching becomes our natural management style.

Zeus and Skiffington's (2002:3) definition of coaching provides us with a useful basis to summarise what we have been saying.

Coaching is essentially a conversation within a productive, results-oriented context. Whilst it is always a conversation, it is not a casual conversation, but is a conversation that should always be conducted in the context of making progress against some predetermined goals. A dialogue takes place between the manager and a team member in terms of which the former assists the latter to access knowledge they already have between them. The team member may never have asked himself or herself the questions, but he or she normally has the answers. A manager coach assists, supports and encourages individuals to find these answers. Coaching is more about asking the right questions than about providing answers.

Coaching is also about learning. It's about helping team members access knowledge they already have, or helping them find a way to access it. Fundamentally, we believe that team members have most of the answers, but their thinking prevents them from accessing it. This may, for example, be because they are unable to see the wood for the trees and it is then the manager coach's job to help them distinguish which is which. Alternatively, where the team member needs to access the solution or information externally, that is, from a source outside of himself or herself, the manager coach's role is to assist him or her in finding where to look. In doing so, manager coaches use various skills such as listening and asking questions, and, in the process, they help their team members to become self-diagnosing, self-correcting and self-generating in that the team members learn how to identify the issue, correct their behaviour themselves and generate their own questions and answers. It is helping them to learn effectively rather than teaching them.

Coaching is about unlocking the potential of people to maximise performance through raising their awareness in a way that leaves the responsibility

for that performance with the team member. Consistent use of coaching enables the team member to continuously improve the way he or she does things.

Coaching is about change and transformation. Some people can decide to make a change in their life and move directly to their goal in the quickest possible manner, with no deviation or hesitation. Some people are really good at *starting* to make changes, but their change programme seems to grind to a halt very quickly. Others are really good at starting out and can maintain progress for a while, but always seem to come up against obstacles and internal blocks. Often it seems that, no matter what we do, we just can't break through these blocks. Changing old habits is difficult. A manager coach observes these habits, opens up new possibilities and supports the team member in the sometimes difficult process of change.

From another perspective, life's rules have changed materially both in our personal spheres and our work environments. Coaching has a real role to play in this change. Consider the following:

OLD RULES	NEW REPLACEMENT RULES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Linear Rule promised progress if we were honest and worked hard. According to the rule, our lives, careers, economy and culture would get better, year by year, generation by generation, if we simply did our best. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Cyclical Rule suggests that we each live in a chapter then renew ourselves and move to the next; we cycle through the chapters, followed by transitions. Manager coaches help team members to manage change; they help them to learn the art of cycling through, of practising self-renewal.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Steady-state Rule provided that, if we worked hard, we would each arrive at a steady state, or plateau, of security and happiness which would last the rest of our lives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Continuous-change Rule will not let us rest. We can no longer expect to arrive at a steady state, a time when our lives become crystallised and predictable. Manager coaches empower team members to manage ongoing change and not be afraid of, or defeated by, it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Outside-in-Rule said that our personal lives are defined by the directives of the society around us. To be winners, we should simply follow the cues in our marriage, schools, religious organisations, careers and laws of the land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Inside-out-Rule says that, to stay on course, we must <i>rely</i> on our own inner beliefs. Manager coaches help team members to learn to be on-purpose people who shape their own actions in a rapidly changing world with the strength of their positive thoughts

	about how they want to be in the world.
➤ The Learning Rule stated that learning is for kids. They learn so they can get launched <i>into</i> adult careers, family life, and leadership roles. Adults shift from learning to working as their main activity and, for the rest of their lives, training plays a minor role.	➤ The Learning-is-for-everyone Rule provides that learning is our primary activity, no matter how young or old we are. Manager coaches help adult team members acquire skills, change roles and functions, and do well in a business milieu that often appears as blurry chaos.

(Hudson 1999:xvii-xviii)

